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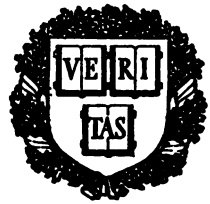

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TREATISES

ON THE

HIGH VENERATION MAN'S INTELLECT OWES TO GOD:

ON

THINGS ABOVE REASON:

AND ON

THE STYLE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

BY THE

HON. ROBERT BOYLE.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY

HENRY ROGERS,

AUTHOR OF CRITICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTIONS TO THE WORKS OF JONATHAN EDWARDS, EDMUND BURKE, AND JEREMY TAYLOR.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THIS is the first volume of the "SACRED CLASSICS" from the pen of a *layman*. This circumstance, however, is by no means to be taken as an indication that the number of works which the secular genius of our country has contributed to the support of religion, is inconsiderable. So far from this being the case, the only difficulty is in selecting from so much that is excellent, those volumes which it is most desirable to include in the present series: it is less easy to stop than to begin. It is, in truth, one of the chief glories of England, that almost all the greatest names connected with her literature and science, have been scarcely less distinguished for their reverence for religion.

This has been more especially the case with all our greatest *philosophers*. In these men, happily for themselves and for mankind, philosophy produced its genuine fruits. Their splendid discoveries, and the wonders of the universe they unfolded, only

inspired them with a more profound reverence for the all-glorious Creator; and, what is not less important, prepared them, by purifying their minds from prejudice, and imbuing them with a reverential regard for truth wherever they might find it, for seriously and candidly investigating, and, as an inevitable consequence, for duly appreciating the evidences by which revealed religion sustains its origin. Thus, like the eastern magi, who reached Bethlehem under the guidance of a star, their very observation of nature only led them the more infallibly to Christ.

Nor is this all. Many of them have not been content with merely declaring their deliberate conviction of the truth of Christianity; like the same eastern sages, they have brought their 'gold and frankincense, and myrrh,' and all the precious things of their philosophy, and laid them with the profoundest homage at the feet of the Redeemer.

Amongst the most impressive examples of this sublime consecration of philosophy and genius to the cause of God and Christianity, must be ranked the Honourable Robert Boyle, the illustrious author of the following treatises; which, together with several others of a similar character, and composed with a similar design, have as much endeared his name to piety, as his splendid discoveries have endeared it to science.

The following Essay will contain a brief sketch

of his life;—an analysis of his character;—and a few observations on the treatises which compose the present volume.

The Honourable Robert Boyle was a native of Lismore, in the province of Munster, Ireland. He was the seventh son of Richard, commonly called the "Great Earl of Cork;" and was born on the 26th of January, 1626. His early nurture was such as might be expected from one who possessed the masculine mind and manly sentiments of his father; in other words, he was brought up in a simple and hardy manner. He himself tells us, in the brief narrative which he has left us of the early part of his life, (and the vivacity and talent with which it is written, make us regret that it is but a fragment,) that his parent "had a perfect aversion for their fondness who use to breed their children so nice and tenderly, that a hot sun or a good shower of rain as much endangers them, as if they were made of butter or of sugar."

At three years of age he lost his mother, a most amiable and talented woman. When quite a child, he acquired a slight habit of *stammering*, of the origin of which he gives the following account: "The second misfortune that befel him, was his acquaintance with some children of his own age, whose stuttering habitude he so long counterfeited, that at last he contracted it; possibly a

just judgment upon his derision, and turning the effects of God's anger into the subject-matter of his sport. Divers experiments, believed the probablest means of cure, were tried with as much successlessness as diligence; so contagious and catching are men's faults, and so dangerous is the familiar commerce of those condemnable customs, that being imitated but in jest, come to be learned and acquired in earnest."

Whether this account of a habit which might have been the result of some slight natural defect, be satisfactory or not, the reflections with which it closes are equally just. It will not have been the first time that sound truths have been deduced from inconclusive premises.

He was not sent to school till he had acquired a knowledge of the Latin and French languages, and the usual rudiments of learning, under one of his father's chaplains, and a French tutor. In 1635 he was sent to Eton, then under the superintendence of the celebrated Sir Henry Wotton. Here his great natural abilities, and that insatiable thirst for knowledge, which characterized him throughout life, soon displayed themselves. After pursuing his studies at this school for more than three years, he was removed to his father's seat at Stalbridge, in Dorsetshire, and committed to the care of the rector of the place. At the close of the year 1638, he accompanied his father to London, and

after staying with him a short time at the Savoy, was sent with an elder brother, Francis Boyle, and under the care of a tutor named Marcombes, to make the tour of the most celebrated countries of Europe. The principal places he visited were Rouen, Paris, Lyons, Geneva, Grenoble, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Genoa. At some of these places he made a considerable stay, more especially at Geneva, where the family of his tutor, Marcombes, resided. In May, 1642, while at Marseilles, he received a letter from his father, acquainting him with the breaking out of the Rebellion in Ireland, commanding his immediate return to England, and telling him, that in the present distracted state of public affairs, he had with difficulty remitted a sum sufficient to pay the expenses home. But what was far worse, these remittances never came to hand, and Mr. Boyle and his brother were compelled to remain on the continent till 1644; when, by disposing of some jewels through the good offices of their tutor, Marcombes, who had, during their stay abroad, befriended them in the most generous manner, they managed to reach England: Mr. Boyle did not arrive, however, till after his father's death. The manor of Stalbridge and several considerable estates in Ireland formed his share of the ample patrimony. Yet such was the confusion in which public affairs were involved, that it was

some time before he received any money from these estates.

As he was abroad for several years, it may readily be conceived, that one so characteristically eager for knowledge, did not neglect his studies. Not content with the information which he acquired by his travels, and which must have been very extensive to a mind so intelligent and observant, he staid for a considerable time at Geneva, Venice, and Florence, and during his residence in these places pursued his studies as if he had been at home. Indeed, during no period of his travels could his ardent mind be completely restrained from the pursuit of knowledge. We are told that "during his travels, he pursued his studies with great vigour; and his brother Francis, afterwards lord Shannon, used to say, that even then he would never lose any vacant time; for if they were upon the road, and walking down a hill, or in a rough way, he would read all the way; and when they came at night to their inn, he would still be studying till supper, and frequently propose such difficulties as he met with in his reading, to his governor."

During the whole of his stay abroad, Mr. Boyle was preserved from that levity and dissipation of character which are so often acquired in travel, and which so frequently transform the youth who

has left home, modest and virtuous, into a coxcomb and an infidel. Happily for him, however, the principles of religion, which had been so early instilled into his mind, kept him from paying for his knowledge the dear price of his virtue. Nay, it even appears by his own account, that his religious sentiments and feelings acquired strength and solidity during his stay on the continent. He left his native land impressed with every feeling of respect and reverence for religion, but he returned a confirmed and decided Christian.

From 1646 till 1650, he resided principally at his manor of Stalbridge. Here he quietly, but with his characteristic ardour of mind, pursued his studies. This period of his life too is memorable as that in which he made his first essays in chemistry; the science which he afterwards pursued with success scarcely inferior to his diligence. During these years of retired study, he frequently made visits to Oxford and London, and enlarged his acquaintance and correspondence with learned men. He was also one of a small society of virtuosi, who, under the name of the "Philosophical College," used to meet for the purpose of mutual aid and encouragement in the prosecution of science. They were afterwards incorporated under the well-known name of the "Royal So-

ciety." It has been often said, that there is no evil which is not incidentally productive of some good. This was eminently the case in the present instance; for the immediate cause of the formation of the Philosophical College was the Civil War, from the confusion and misery of which, Boyle and his intellectual associates sought refuge in a more devoted pursuit of science. Thus, those very calamities, which in general so effectually arrest the progress of science and knowledge, as indeed of all else that is good, produced in this solitary instance the opposite effects.

The greater part of the years 1652 and 1653 was spent in Ireland, where, with his friend, the well-known Sir William Petty, he pursued, to some extent, the studies of anatomy and physiology. In 1654 he returned to England, and fixed his residence at Oxford, where he remained till 1668. He had long meditated this step, principally that he might pursue his studies under more advantageous circumstances, as well as for the sake of that philosophical society which he could not so readily find elsewhere. Here he cultivated with the utmost assiduity the exact sciences, and almost every branch of experimental philosophy, giving his chief attention, however, to his favourite pursuit, chemistry: here, by the assistance of his friend Hooke, he perfected the air-pump, and made

many of his most valuable discoveries; and here he produced many of his most important philosophical works.

But he did not restrict himself to science alone. With the aid of the great orientalist, Pococke, and the celebrated theologians, Barlow, afterwards bishop of Lincoln, and Samuel Clarke, he prosecuted the study of the sacred languages, of theology and of biblical criticism. Nor was his life merely that of a lazy speculatist or intellectual voluptuary. Theology was not with him, as it has been with too many, a barely speculative science; he studied, that he might practise it. Its truths operated upon him with the force of so many powerful *practical* principles. Under its influence, his ample fortune was constantly employed in the encouragement of projects of public utility, more especially such as had for their object the diffusion of religious truth and the progress of the gospel; in a word, in whatever tended to promote the honour of God and the welfare of his species. During the period of the civil wars and the commonwealth, it is hardly necessary to say that a man whose pursuits were so exclusively scientific and literary, whose temper was so peaceful and catholic, whose life was so inoffensive, and who took no active part whatever in politics, was permitted to enjoy undisturbed tranquillity.

After the restoration, he was honourably no-

ticed by the king and several of his ministers, more especially by Clarendon. This nobleman rightly judging that one who had reflected such lustre on the profession of Christianity as a *layman*, would sustain with no less honour the character of a *clergyman*, even pressed him to enter the church. This proposal, however, after much deliberation he declined. His principal reasons, the latter of which is abundantly creditable to that tenderness of conscience which distinguished him throughout life, were as follows:—

"He knew that the irreligious fortified themselves against all that was said by the clergy with this—that it was their trade, and that they were paid for it. He hoped, therefore, that he might have the more influence, the less he shared in the patrimony of the church. But his main reason was, that he had so high a sense of the obligations, importance, and difficulty of the pastoral care, that he durst not undertake it; 'especially,' says bishop Burnet, 'not having felt within himself an inward motion to it by the Holy Ghost; and the first question that is put to those who come to be initiated into the service of the church, relating to that motion, he, who had not felt it, thought he durst not make the step, lest otherwise he should have lied to the Holy Ghost. So solemnly and seriously did he judge of sacred matters.'"

But though he refused to enter the church, he

nevertheless filled several important public stations. He became one of the directors of the East India Company, and in this situation exerted himself to the utmost to render the extension of commerce instrumental to the progress of religious truth amongst the natives of the East. He was also appointed governor of the Society for propagating the Gospel in New England and the parts adjacent. In 1663 the Royal Society was incorporated, and he was appointed one of the council. In 1664 he was elected into the company of the Royal Mines, and appears to have been engaged during the whole of that year in public business. In 1665 he was nominated provost of Eton College: this office, however, he declined, under the idea that its duties would interfere with the prosecution of his studies.

In 1668 Mr. Boyle removed to London, where he spent the remainder of his days at the house of his much-loved and highly-accomplished sister, Lady Ranelagh, in Pall-Mall. Not very long after his arrival in London he was seized with a severe paralysis, from which he very slowly recovered, and which did not permit him to resume his studies till 1671.

He attributes his recovery to the joint influence of a great number of strange remedies, and, amongst the rest, to his taking every day, for a considerable period, a portion of "the flesh of dried vipers," a

remedy which many would think hardly more tolerable than the disease.

From this period, until 1680, he pursued his studies with the same assiduity as at Oxford. Scarcely a year passed in which he did not produce some work or other connected with his multifarious scientific pursuits, while his noble fortune was still expended as freely as ever in various projects of beneficence and Christian philanthophy. Amongst the principal of these may be mentioned, that he ordered five hundred copies of the Gospels and the Acts to be translated and printed in the Malayan tongue, and sent to the East at his own charge; and a considerable number of Pococke's Arabic translation, (of which he was a munificent patron,) to be distributed in every country in which that language was spoken. He also contributed large sums to the translation of the Welch and Irish Bibles.

In 1680, the Royal Society, as a mark of the great esteem in which they held his character, elected him as their president; but owing to some scruples on the subject of oaths he declined that honour. About this time he engaged in the noble attempt to aid the celebrated missionary Elliot in his endeavours to propagate Christianity amongst the aborigines of North America. The correspondence between these two men, equally extraordinary, and equally worthy of reverence in dif-

ferent ways, may be seen in the Appendix to Birch's Life of Boyle. It is deeply interesting.

About 1689, finding his infirmities increasing, he resolved to forego some of his public engagements, and much of the gratification of literary society, that he might obtain leisure to complete and digest some of his yet unfinished works. With this view he published an advertisement, part of which runs thus:—"He is also obliged further to intimate, that by these and other inducements he does at length, though unwillingly, find himself reduced to deny himself part of the satisfaction frequently brought him by the conversation of his friends and other ingenious persons, and to desire to be excused from receiving visits (unless upon occasions very extraordinary) two days in the week, namely, on the forenoon of Tuesdays and Fridays, (both foreign post-days,) and on Wednesdays and Saturdays in the afternoon, that he may have some time, both to recruit his spirits, to range his papers, and fill up the *lacunæ* of them, and to take some care of his affairs in Ireland, which are very much disordered, and have their face often changed by the public calamities there."

In the summer of 1690 the inroads on his health became so alarming, that he resolved to execute his last will; a document which is throughout a noble proof of his ardent love for science and for

religion. In the codicils attached to it, he makes provision for the institution of that noble lecture which, named from him, has blessed this country with so many able pieces in defence of natural and revealed religion. He also left considerable sums in aid of his favourite project for promoting Christianity amongst the American Indians. The preamble is well worthy of a Christian, and deserves to be quoted.

"In the name of God, Amen. I Robert Boyle, of Stalbridge, in the county of Dorset, Esq., youngest son of the late right honourable Richard, earl of Cork, deceased, being, God be praised, of good and perfect memory, and taking into due and serious consideration the certainty of death, and the uncertainty both of the time and manner of it; being likewise desirous, when I come to die, to have nothing to do but to die christianly, without being hindered by any avoidable distractions from employing the last hours of my life in sending up my desires and meditations before me to heaven, do make and ordain this my last will and testament in writing, in manner and form following.

"First and chiefly, I commend my soul to Almighty God, my Creator, with full confidence of the pardon of all my sins in and through the merits and mediation of my alone Saviour Jesus Christ; and my body I commit to the earth, to be

decently buried within the cities of London or Westminster, in case I die in England, without escutcheons, or unnecessary pomp, and without any superfluous ceremonies."

In the autumn of the same year he appeared visibly sinking; he lingered on however till the month of December. His end is supposed to have been a little hastened by the death of his beloved sister, the Lady Ranelagh, whom he survived only a week. He died on the 23rd of December, 1691.

On the 7th of January he was buried in St. Martin's Church, in the Fields. His funeral sermon was preached by his friend Bishop Burnet, who chose for his text, on the melancholy occasion, those most appropriate words of Solomon: "God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, knowledge, and joy."[1]

Mr. Boyle was never married, nor does he ever appear to have had any serious thoughts of entering into that state. He is said, however, to have paid his addresses to the daughter of the earl of Monmouth, and that it was his disappointment in this suit which gave rise to his little treatise, entitled "Seraphic Love."

That he had determined to abstain from matrimony long before age would have rendered it ridiculous to think of it, sufficiently appears by an

[1] Eccles. ii. 26.

amusing letter to his niece Lady Barrymore, who had heard a report that he had been lately married.

" * * * It is high time for me to hasten the payment of the thanks I owe your ladyship for the joy you are pleased to wish me, and of which that wish possibly gives me more than the occasion of it would. You have certainly reason, madam, to suspend your belief of a marriage celebrated by no priest but fame, and made unknown to the supposed bridegroom. I may possibly, ere long, give you a fit of the spleen upon this theme; but at present it were incongruous to blend such pure raillery, as I ever prate of matrimony and amours with, among things I am so serious in as those this scribble presents you. I shall, therefore, only tell you, that the little gentleman and I are still at the old defiance. You have carried away too many of the perfections of your sex, to leave enough in this country for the reducing so stubborn a heart as mine, whose conquest were a task of so much difficulty, and is so little worth it, that the latter property is always likely to deter any, that hath beauty and merit enough to overcome the former. But, though this untamed heart be thus insensible to the thing itself called love, it is yet very accessible to things very near of kin to that passion; and esteem, friendship, respect, and even admiration, are things, that their proper objects

fail not proportionately to exact of me, and consequently are qualities, which in their highest degrees are really and constantly paid my lady Barrymore by her

"Most obliged humble Servant,
"And affectionate Uncle,
"ROBERT BOYLE."

In person, Mr. Boyle was tall and slight, his countenance pale, his eyes weak, his constitution delicate, and demanding, throughout the greater part of his life, simple and regular habits, an exact regimen, and the most scrupulous temperance in diet. Under such circumstances, his prodigious acquisitions and unwearied labours show, in a striking manner, how the energies of a noble mind can triumph over the infirmities of a feeble body.

To characterize or even to enumerate the various philosophical works which Mr. Boyle published during his long career would far exceed the limits of the present Essay, and would be wholly foreign from its design. Suffice it to say, there are few topics connected with any of the branches of natural philosophy, on which he did not at one time or other touch.—It is more to the present purpose, to mention his theological writings. The principal, besides those contained in the present volume, are his "Christian Virtuoso;"

"Seraphic Love;" a tract, entitled, "Greatness of Mind promoted by Christianity;" and his "Excellency of Theology, or the Preeminence of the Study of Divinity above that of Natural Philosophy." Most of these pieces,—and the same remark applies in great measure, to his philosophical writings,—appeared under singularly disadvantageous circumstances. Some of them were written or commenced in very early life, though they were not published for many years after; and then in such haste and amidst the pressure of so many engagements, that the noble author had not time to revise and correct them as he would otherwise have done, or even to purify them from those juvenilities which occasionally disfigure his "Seraphic Love," and one or two other of his theological pieces. Some of them were mere sections and fragments of larger works, which the author never found time to complete; and most of them were composed while he was still prosecuting, with his characteristic ardour, his researches and studies into almost every branch of literature and science. It may be added lastly, that most of his writings were published as peculiar exigencies demanded or leisure afforded opportunity.

No complete collection was made during his lifetime, though it appears that he was earnestly solicited by the celebrated Cudworth, to allow such an

edition to be put forth. After his death, they were all published, together with his life, and some few posthumous pieces, by Birch.[1]

We must now say a few words of the character of this great man.

Though chiefly known to the world as an experimental philosopher, Boyle possessed powers which were almost equally adapted to several different departments of human pursuit. To him belonged all the noblest qualities of intellect, and none of them in scanty measure; aptitudes for almost every branch of science and of literature, and a capacity to excel in them all. His was none of those mutilated intellects, whose tendencies are so exclusively in one direction, that, although almost more than men in some respects, they are scarcely better than children in others, and who present to us a spectacle of strength and weakness, power and imbecility, as humiliating as it is instructive. The limits of any one science, however ample, could not circumscribe *him*. In a word, he was distinguished by that comprehensiveness, that compass of mind, which, more than any other quality, has characterised the greatest of our British philosophers, and which, while fitting them for taking the highest station in those particular departments of

[1] They were published in five volumes, folio, and afterwards in six volumes quarto.

science to which they have respectively devoted themselves, has enabled them to attain no mean eminence in widely different directions.

In Boyle, this happy versatility of talent found its proper stimulus, for he conjoined with it the most ravenous appetite for knowledge. The severe sciences, experimental philosophy in all its branches, —pneumatics, hydrostatics, chemistry, physiology, anatomy, the study of plants and animals, —history, theology, the learned languages, more especially Hebrew, Syriac, and Chaldee, and sacred criticism, of which he was no mean master— —all these he prosecuted with an ardour scarcely second to that with which he watched the processes of the crucible and alembic.

Though he cultivated poetry and polite literature only in early life, his whole writings show that he possessed imagination and taste in a degree which would have secured him no mean place in these departments, had not circumstances determined him to pursuits still more important.

Perhaps, considered simply as an experimental philosopher, great and just as is the fame he acquired, the multifarious objects of his pursuit prevented his attaining that reputation, which a more exclusive devotion to some single branch of science would have insured him. It has been well remarked by an eminent philosophical writer of the present day, that " Boyle seemed animated

by an enthusiasm of ardour, which hurried him from subject to subject, and from experiment to experiment, without a moment's intermission, and with a sort of undistinguishing appetite."[1] This boundless and often ill-directed curiosity was to be expected in an age like his, when the Baconian methods of discovery first turned philosophy loose into the wide field of nature. The philosophers of that period resembled the first colonists in some new and singularly fertile country, who wander about hither and thither, perplexed where to settle, where all is new and so much is beautiful, and snatching at the spontaneous fruits which the exuberance of nature offers. It was left to a subsequent period, when the votaries of science had become more numerous, and discovery more rare and difficult, to bring every spot to the highest point of cultivation. This was not to be expected at first. Boyle and many of his contemporaries rioted and revelled in that first vintage of science, and threw away many a cluster that was only half pressed.

Boyle was one of the very first who avowedly and systematically reduced to practice the Baconian theory of induction. He was born in the same year that greatest of philosophers died; and as a certain writer has said, "he seemed to have been designed by nature to succeed to the labours and inquiries

[1] Sir John Herschell's "Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy."

of that extraordinary genius." It is true, many of Mr. Boyle's experiments were purely *tentative*, that is, made at random, without any sagacious and distinctly formed conjecture as to the result in which they might terminate. This was to be expected, however, from that eager and boundless curiosity, which the experimental method, the laws of which were still but imperfectly understood, could not fail to stimulate; and might be excused, when such was the ignorance of chemistry and the kindred sciences, that hardly any experiment could be totally barren.

That Boyle, as a philosopher, did not surmount all the prejudices of his age; that, for example, he believed in the transmutation of metals and some other strange things; that he sometimes speaks of the mysteries of his favourite science a little too much in the style of the empirics of the hermetic art, will excite little surprise in those who consider that even Bacon believed in witchcraft; and none at all in those who reflect on the gradual progress of human knowledge, the slow process by which truth supplants error, and the, at best, partial liberty which the most vigorous intellect can obtain from the prejudices imposed by education. To expect the human mind, in even a Bacon or a Boyle, at once to put off all the prejudices of ages, and all the early-formed habitudes of thought, is about as rational as to expect that there shall be no long

and tedious dawning between midnight and mid-day.

The imaginative powers of Boyle were such as have not often fallen to the lot of distinguished philosophers; and it is evident from his early life, that had not peculiar circumstances come in aid of his strong propensities for science, it would have been doubtful whether literature or philosophy would ultimately have obtained his suffrage. He tells us that in early life "he would very often steal away from all company, and spend four or five hours alone in the fields, and think at random, making his delighted imagination the busy scene, where some romance or other was daily acted; which, though imputed to his melancholy, was in effect but an usual excursion of his yet untamed habitude of roving, a custom (as his own experience often and sadly taught him) much more easily contracted than destroyed."

He also informs us, that having addicted himself rather too freely to the perusal of books of fiction, "they meeting in him with a restless fancy, then made more susceptible of any impressions by an unemployed pensiveness, accustomed his thoughts to such a habitude of roving, that he has scarce ever been their quiet master since, but they would take all occasions to steal away, and go a gadding to objects then unseasonable and impertinent; so great an unhappiness it is for persons

that are born with such busy thoughts, not to have congruent objects proposed to them at first."

In order to tame his imagination, and to reclaim his wayward thoughts, he applied himself sedulously to the severe sciences. This was undoubtedly an effectual remedy; the diagrams of mathematics and the mystic symbols of algebra form as potent a spell to subdue an untamed and truant fancy, as ever were a magician's cabalistic characters to bind a rebellious and roving spirit.

Happily for his readers, however, Boyle's imagination was only sobered, not destroyed, by this severe dicipline. It was still an active principle, and has imparted no little vivacity and beauty to the style of his theological works.

The resemblances on which the imagination founds its illustrations will, of course, be as is the knowledge from which such analogies are supplied. It will reflect the tints and colours of the objects by which the mind is filled. In accordance with this, the comparisons and similies of Boyle are borrowed from science far more frequently than from any other source. Many of them are not only singularly just and happy, but from this very circumstance singularly impressive; because they derive additional force and lustre from their novelty and originality. It is rarely that a poet's fancy ventures into the regions of science; if it did, it might probably find, that independently of far

higher benefits which science could confer, it would not fail to augment the mere materials of poetical combination to a wondrous extent. It has been said, indeed, (with what truth the present writer is not able to say,) that a late celebrated author used sometimes to attend lecturers on science, principally for the purpose of furnishing his imagination with new and beautiful illustrations.

But Mr. Boyle's illustrations are often in the highest degree felicitous, even where he does not fetch them from the favourite realms of science. We should particularly instance those which he has derived from an apt application of incidents and facts of the Scripture history. In this he resembles many of the most eminent divines of his day. To particularize would be endless: they occur in almost every page of the "Considerations on the Style of the Scripture," and the singular brilliancy and appropriateness of many of them cannot fail to arrest the attention of the reader.

Mr. Boyle's powers of acquisition must have been unusually vigorous. He, himself, it is true, often complains of the treachery of his memory. It is very possible, certainly, that it may not have been so tenacious as in many men; still his vast and very various acquisitions sufficiently prove that he has greatly overrated its deficiencies.

The *style* of Boyle's theological writings will advantageously bear comparison with that of most

of the divines of his age. In many respects, it far surpasses that of the generality of them. Familiar with the manners of the world, and of polished life, he is free from the pedantry which so often deforms the theological writers of the age, and from the formality and stiffness which are so characteristic of retired scholarship. His composition is consequently marked by a more easy, natural, unconstrained manner, as well as by greater elegance and taste than are usually found among the theological writers of the day. His method of treating a subject, too, is far superior to theirs. This advantage is to be attributed in great measure to his comparative ignorance of the schoolmen. It was difficult, as almost all the theological productions of the age show, to be familiar with those writers, without becoming in some measure infected with their *vices of manner*. Boyle was exposed to no such hazard. Detesting their philosophy, as he was bound to do as a disciple of the new system, Boyle was far less read in them than the theologians of the age, who were of course expected to be versed in them. The authority of their ethics and their divinity long outlived that of their physics; and though, therefore, Boyle or any other philosopher might neglect, a theologian could not be safely ignorant of them. The consequence was, that many of the schoolmen's faults, in point of style and method, very generally charac-

terized the compositions of the divines of the seventeenth century: the principal are, an affectation of logical precision; a superabundance of subtle distinctions and refined definitions; a needless parade of the forms of syllogistic reasoning, and all the technicalities of the school-logic, and all this with divisions and subdivisions, without end. From faults of this kind Boyle is entirely free: his method is usually remarkably simple and natural.

The chief vices of his style are excessive copiousness of diction, and a wearisome length and involution in the structure of the sentences. It may also be noted, that with a degree of taste and elegance such as rarely belonged to the writers of the age, he is occasionally guilty of inaccuracies such as very few, even of his most careless contemporaries fell into; as for instance, in the formation of the comparatives and superlatives of adjectives. Thus, whatever the laxity of criticism which distinguished the day, and whatever the licence in which writers indulged, such comparatives as "impartialler," "distanter," or "disadvantageouser;" or such superlatives as "seducingest, sparklingest, loudliest," are not often to be met with in any writings but his own. Upon the whole, however, they are marked by a degree of taste and propriety very unusual in his time.

Such briefly was Boyle's *intellectual* character. But great as he was as a philosopher, he was dis-

tinguished by far higher qualities than any we have yet enumerated. He was great far beyond all the ordinary and vulgar estimates of greatness, —for he was truly GOOD. His genius and his philosophy were sanctified by religion, and that religion, CHRISTIANITY.

It is a sad proof of the degeneracy and depravity of our race, that intellectual excellence should inspire such idolatrous admiration, while moral greatness—the highest style of greatness—even where it is recognized and felt,—receives a homage so much less hearty, spontaneous, and enthusiastic, and so rarely stimulates, as does every other species of character we admire, to emulation. But heaven will revise all the false estimates of earth; nay, the time is fast coming, when the earth will correct them herself; when Robert Boyle shall appear more truly great as an eminent Christian than as an eminent philosopher.

Like many other men who have distinguished themselves by their achievements in science, he appears to have been little troubled with his mere animal appetites, and to have easily subjected them to control. Throughout life he practised the severest temperance. He tells us, that he was naturally somewhat irascible, but that he was early taught to repress this tendency; the attempt, if we may judge from all that has reached us of his habits in after-life, seems to have been completely successful.

The early traits of Boyle's character sufficiently indicate a mind of unusual amiability. His disposition was open, frank, generous, affectionate, and gentle in a remarkable degree: he was, from his very earliest childhood, characterized by a scrupulous love of truth.[1] At what time Christianity first laid hold of these rude elements of a noble and virtuous mind, and transformed them

[1] A ludicrous instance of his scrupulous love of truth occurs in the narrative he has left us of his youth, which we shall insert here for the amusement of the reader.

"Lying was a vice both so contrary to his nature, and so inconsistent with his principles, that as there was scarce any thing he more greedily desired than to know the truth, so was there scarce any thing he more perfectly detested, than not to speak it: which brings into my mind a foolish story I have heard him jeered with by his sister, my Lady Ranelagh, how she having given strict order to have a fruit-tree preserved for his sister-in-law, the Lady Dungarvan, he accidentally coming into the garden, and ignoring the prohibition, did eat half a score of them, for which being chidden by his sister Ranelagh, (for he was yet a child,) and being told by way of aggravation, that he had eaten half a dozen plums, 'Nay, truly, sister, (answers he simply to her,) I have eaten half a score.' So perfect an enemy was he to a lie, that he had rather accuse himself of another fault, than be suspected to be guilty of that. This trivial passage I have mentioned now, not that I think, that in itself it deserves a relation, but because as the sun is seen best at his rising and his setting, so men's native dispositions are clearliest perceived whilst they are children, and when they are dying. And, certainly, these little sudden accidents are the greatest discoverers of men's true humours; for whilst the inconsiderateness of the thing affords no temptation to dissemble, and the suddenness of the time allows no leisure to put disguises on, men's dis-

into the brighter graces of the gospel is uncertain. It must have been, however, at a very tender age. The religious knowledge early instilled into his mind, seems to have been blessed to him; but the decisive change, according to his own account, appears to have taken place during his stay on the continent. Though mercifully preserved, as we have already observed, from any taint of immorality during the perilous period of his travels, he acknowledges that his sense of the importance and reality of religion had at one time perceptibly declined. He was excited to salutary reflection by the terrors of a night of fearful tempest, and from that time religion ruled with the force of an abiding principle.

Though Boyle was favoured with religious education, and was early impressed with a sense of the importance of religion, his was not a mind which was likely to adopt any system from respect for his relatives, or reverence for antiquity, or in mere conformity with the custom of his nation or age, or from any thing short of a sober, well-founded conviction of its truth. He accordingly studied with diligence the whole subject of the evidences of

positions do appear in their true genuine shape, whereas most of those actions, that are done before others, are so much done for others; I mean most solemn actions are so personated, that we may much more probably guess from thence, what men desire to seem, than what they are; such public formal acts much rather being adjusted to men's designs, than flowing from their inclinations."

Christianity, and above all, examined with devout reverence, that inspired volume in which its revelations are contained. An investigation thus honestly conducted, issued, as it ever will issue, with a candid and upright mind—he gave to Christianity his deliberate approval, the approval of an enlightened intellect, not less than of a sanctified heart.

Seldom has Christianity produced a piety more elevated, or a conduct more blameless or uniformly consistent than it produced in Robert Boyle. His spirit was habitually serious and devout. Such was his reverence for GOD, that it is said, he never even casually mentioned that sacred name in the most ordinary conversation, without making a visible pause in his discourse, as though he would place his soul in a posture of devout and humble adoration, before making the slightest reference to a subject so awful.

The Scriptures ever found him a diligent and prayerful student. That he might prosecute the study of it the more successfully, he obtained a familiar acquaintance with the languages in which it was written, and eagerly availed himself of all the aids of sacred criticism. The account he gives of the pains he justly thought it worth while to take to make himself master of the contents of the sacred volume is so deeply interesting, that we feel we should be guilty of unpardonable neglect

if we omitted to lay it before the reader. It is extracted from some loose sheets, intended to form part of an "Essay on the Scriptures," of which the "Considerations on the Style of the Scriptures" published in the present volume is but a fragment. "As I shall not exact (says he) the study of the original from those, whose want of parts or leisure dispenseth them from it; so cannot I but discommend those, who wanting neither abilities, time, nor convenience to range through I know not how many other studies, can yet decline this; and who, sparing no toil nor watches to put it out of the power of the most celebrated philosophers to deceive them in another doctrine, leave themselves obnoxious to the ignorance, fraud, or partiality of an interpreter in that of salvation; and thereby seem more shy of taking any opinions upon trust, than those, in whose truth or falseness no less than God's glory, and peradventure their own eternal condition, is concerned. Methinks those that learn other languages, should not grudge those that God hath honoured with speaking to us, and employed to bless us with that heavenly doctrine, that comes from him, and leads to him. When I have come into the Jewish schools, and seen those children, that were never bred up for more than tradesmen bred up to speak (what hath been pecucularly called) God's tongue, as soon as their mother's, I have blushed to think, how many

gown-men, that boast themselves to be the true Israelites, are perfect strangers to the language of Canaan: which I would learn, were it but to be able to pay God the respect usual from civil inferiors to princes, with whom they are wont to converse in their own languages. For my part, I *** that have a memory so unhappy and so unfit to [supply] my intellectual deficiencies, and the rest of my disabilities, that it often strongly tempts me to give over my studies, and abandon an employment, wherein my slow acquists are (by the treacherousness of my memory) so easily lost; besides this disadvantage, I say, those excellent sciences, the mathematics, having been the first I addicted myself to, and was fond of, and experimental philosophy with its key, chemistry, succeeding them in my esteem and applications; my propensity and value for real learning gave me so much aversion and contempt for the empty study of words, that not only I have visited divers countries, whose languages I could never vouchsafe to study, but I could never yet be induced to learn the native tongue of the kingdom I was born and for some years bred in. But, in spite of the greatness of these indispositions to the study of tongues, my veneration for the Scripture made one of the greatest despisers of verbal learning, leave Aristotle and Paracelsus to turn grammarian, and where he could not have the help of any living teacher, engaged

him to learn as much Greek and Hebrew as sufficed to read the Old and New Testament, merely that he may do so in the Hebrew and Greek, and thereby free himself from the necessity of relying on a translation. And after I had almost learned by rote an Hebrew grammar, to improve myself in Scripture criticisms, in the Jewish way of reading the oracles committed to them, I, not over-cheaply, purchased divers private conferences with one of their skilfullest doctors, (as St. Jerome had those nocturnal meetings, which so much helped to make him the solidest expositor of all the fathers, with Barraban or *** the Jew,) I received of him few lessons that cost me not twenty miles riding, at a time when I was in physic, and my health very unsettled. A Chaldee grammar I likewise took the pains of learning, to be able to understand that part of Daniel, and those few other portions of Scripture, that were written in that tongue; and I have added a Syriac grammar purely to be able one day to read the divine discourses of our Saviour in his own language; in which I can truly profess, with the famous publisher of the Syriac Testament, Guido Fabricius, (in his dedication of that book, and his version of it, to the then French king,) that I had no instructor to teach me so much as to know the letters, but have been, to use the words he borrows of the learned Budæus, *αὐτοδίδακτος ἀλλ' οὐ θεοδίδακτος*, have had no other living teacher but

God and myself in the little grammatical learning I have acquired in those four tongues, in which the better understanding and relishing of the Scripture limit my pretensions. Nor do I at all repent my labour, though, to secure my progress and acquists in these languages, my bad memory still reduces me to a constant and frequent recollection of some choice institutions of them all. For certainly the satisfaction of understanding God, and those excellent persons celebrated even in his book, express themselves in their own very terms and proper languages, doth richly recompense the pains of learning them; for, according to the known saying,

> 'Quamvis allatâ gratus sit sapor in undâ,
> Dulcius ex ipso fonte bibuntur aquæ.
>
> 'Though we stream-waters not unpleasant think,
> Yet with more gusto of the spring we drink.'

"It is true, that a solid knowledge of that mysterious language God and his prophets spake (whatever is given out to the contrary by superficialists, amongst whom I remember a Jewish professor of my acquaintance used to reckon many, that are thought and think themselves Hebricians, because they could without hesitation and the help of a translation or a dictionary read and render in their own tongue an Hebrew chapter) is, I say, somewhat difficult, but not so difficult but that so slow a proficient as I could in less than a year, of which not

the least part was usurped by frequent sicknesses and journeys, by furnaces, and by (which is none of the modestest thieves of time) the conversation of young ladies, make a not inconsiderable progress towards the understanding of both Testaments in both their originals. * * *

"For my part, that reflect often on David's generosity, who would not offer as a sacrifice to the Lord his God that which cost him nothing, I esteem no labour lavished, that illustrates or endears to me that divine book; my addictedness to which I gratulate to myself, as thinking it no treacherous sign, that God loves a man, that he inclines his heart to love the Scriptures, where the truths are so precious and important that the purchase must at least deserve the price. And I confess myself to be none of those lazy persons, that seem to expect to obtain from God the knowledge of the wonders of his book upon as easy terms, as Adam did a wife, by sleeping profoundly, and having her presented to him at his awaking."

The Treatise "on the Style of the Scriptures," printed in this volume, will best show how he profited by his diligence; with what veneration the sacred volume was regarded, and how well it was understood!

His whole conduct in public and private life adorned the religion he professed, and demonstrated at once its power and its excellence. In

him Christianity bore its appropriate fruits; and, as in a thousand other cases, his impressive and lovely example furnished a far more powerful argument for the truth of the gospel, than could be afforded by the cold homage of even the loftiest understanding. Such a spectacle of uniform gentleness, humility, integrity, courtesy, and benevolence, as was exhibited in his life, *will* extort, even from the most unreflecting, some admiration of the excellence of that religion which produced it.

To several of his most munificent benefactions in the cause of Christian philanthropy, some allusion has been already made in the biographical sketch. Suffice it to say here, that over and above extraordinary acts of beneficence, his charities, during by far the greater part of his life, never amounted to less than 1,000*l.* a-year.

He took no part in the unhappy controversies which distracted the age. His serene and placid spirit recoiled from controversies of every kind, but especially from such as were alike distasteful to his temper and alien from his pursuits, and which appeared to him, as they must to every other sober mind, to have been prosecuted with an animosity and rancour so utterly disproportionate to their importance.

Both his philosophy and his Christianity taught him the utmost tolerance towards others. Many passages in his writings and letters show that he

abhorred persecution in whatsoever form disguised, and by whatsoever party practised.

If, upon all this, it be said that philosophy might have produced this varied excellence, we ask, where are the men, in whom philosophy *has* produced it? Where are the men, not merely of *inoffensive lives and externally decent conduct*—for, happily for society, these common fruits do not require even philosophy to mature them—but of active benevolence and solid goodness, who have been made such by philosophy alone?

And here we may add, that Boyle was eminently distinguished by those *species* of moral excellence to which philosophy, singly considered, is not only not favourable, but almost uniformly unfriendly. We refer to such traits of character as humility, meekness, patience of human infirmities and human prejudices, and pity for human ignorance, all conjoined with that unwearied benevolence which busies itself in endeavouring to relieve the wretchedness it compassionates. Whatever the peculiar moral excellencies philosophy may pretend to cherish,—to such as these, she undoubtedly cannot lay claim as her characteristic fruits: and alas! if we may judge from the prevailing dispositions of many of her most eminent votaries, she does not even *wish* to lay claim to them. When unsanctified by a far mightier principle than any she can bring to bear on human character, her tendencies are the

very reverse of all this. Alone, she produces pride of intellect, self-sufficiency, the vain self-gratulations of supposed superiority, scorn of human infirmities and impatience of human ignorance.

On the whole, it may be affirmed, that few men have ever been distinguished by a more blameless and even course of life, or by one more strongly marked by all the traces of true worth, than was Robert Boyle. He descended to his grave rich in all the honours which humanity should most covet, and followed by the benedictions of his own and of all coming ages.

We cannot close this Essay without offering a remark or two, suggested by the character of this illustrious man, to those who, like him, are engaged in the pursuit of science. It was once a popular, and is still a somewhat prevalent prejudice, that the study of natural philosophy is in some way or other intimately connected with religious scepticism, more especially with a disbelief of Christianity. That there is any such direct connexion between the two may be safely denied; and the supposition is satisfactorily confuted by the fact, that by far the greatest names of science are associated with a full belief of Christianity, after a fair investigation of its evidences. But that such pursuits may become accidentally the causes of scepticism, and that in two ways, must be admitted.

1. They may become so, as indeed every thing else may, by being made the exclusive objects of the mind's attention. This is not at all wonderful; for it is only saying, that a man, whatever his knowledge of physical science, is not likely to believe that of which he knows nothing, and that he is not likely to know what he has never studied. Now Christianity, as much as those sciences of which the philsopher is such an idolater, appeals to its appropriate evidences, and submits them to candid examination. Is it any wonder that a man who has never paid the slightest attention to those evidences, should withhold his assent from them?

Now, it may be safely affirmed, that it is in this class, that by far the larger number of the sceptics who become such in the pursuit of natural philosophy are to be ranked. The bulk of them have never fairly investigated the evidences of that system of religion which they take upon them to reject and to deride. They have, in flagrant and open inconsistency with the principles on which they usually philosophize, taken the "high *priori* road;" and determined that a system, which exhibits truths so widely different from those with which they are chiefly conversant, and which is substantiated by an appeal to a *species*, or at least a *degree* of evidence so very different from that which enters into their scientific reasonings, *cannot* be

true. Such conduct as this, whatever such men may be in their own department, is any thing but philosophical.

We may easily conceive the immeasurable scorn with which they would regard a theologian, who, however well acquainted with his own science, should presume to pronounce on the merits of some philosophical hypothesis, of which he was proved to be ignorant. This contempt would be just; yet not more just than that with which they may be visited when they presume to dogmatize on matters of which they have no adequate knowledge. The conduct of the one party is precisely the same with that of the other.

Experimental philosophy maintains, and justly, that nothing shall be received but upon the basis of well ascertained experiments or observation; and that nothing shall be rejected which has been thus established, however it may oppose long-rooted prejudice or venerable error; that no *à priori* reasoning shall be permitted to throw any doubt on indubitable matter of fact. Christianity claims the same privilege; a keen, but at the same time, honest investigation of its evidences, is nothing but the *experimental philosophy* applied to religion. If rejected at all, the Bible can be justly rejected only after a full and dispassionate examination of its claims to our belief.

That by far greater number of sceptical men of

science *have* been grossly ignorant of the evidences of Christianity, will be doubted by none who have had much private intercourse with such persons, or are versed in the writings of those among them who have made their books of science a vehicle of their infidelity. The absurd, and not unfrequently even childish objections they will urge—objections which they might have seen answered over and over again in the merest manuals of Christian evidences,—show that they have never entered even into the most cursory investigation of the subject. In the meantime, it should at least render them more modest, if it cannot persuade them to a thorough investigation of the matter for themselves, that all the greatest philosophers who have investigated the evidences of Christianity have proclaimed their deliberate and solemn conviction of its TRUTH.

2. But it was hinted that the ardent pursuit of physical science might accidentally become, in another way, a cause of scepticism. It is not to be denied, that oftentimes the *species* and always the *degree* of evidence, on which its truths depend, are of a very different character from any which can be employed to substantiate the truths of Christianity, or indeed any other truths which can be established only by the same species of evidence. And as physical science, from its very nature, recommends itself chiefly to such minds as by their native ten-

dencies are better able to appreciate the former species of evidence than the latter, it is not to be wondered at, that from the influence of this twofold cause, the habits of mind engendered by a long-continued and almost exclusive addictedness to such pursuits should not only *disincline* the mind, but in some degree *incapacitate* it for a candid and fair investigation of that kind of evidence on which other truths must be established; established, not indeed less conclusively to a truly philosophical and comprehensive mind, but only in a totally different way. In conformity with these remarks, it has been sometimes observed, that some very eminent mathematicians have been in some measure incapable of perceiving the force of all evidence but such as is strictly demonstrative; while, on the other hand, it has been remarked that eminent lawyers have been far more ready to appreciate the force of the Christian evidences than those who, distinguished for their devotedness to the pursuit of the pure or the mixed sciences, are tempted to demand a species of proof of which the very subject is confessedly insusceptible. The simple fact is, that the one party is far better acquainted with the nature and force of moral evidence than the other, for it is the sole element of all his reasonings.

It is no matter of surprise then, that the student of the exact sciences, when he withdraws his attention from his mathematical demonstrations, or turns

his gaze from those phenomena of nature, which present a spectacle of harmony and uniformity so beautiful, to the totally different elements of that evidence on which the truths of ethics and religion are founded, should manifest, not only a distaste for it, but, unless gifted with unusual comprehensiveness and grasp of mind, a degree of incapacity to appreciate it. In balancing testimony, in harmonizing contradictory statements, in weighing probabilities, he sees nothing of that constancy, uniformity and precision, which he has been accustomed to admire; and the very *habits* of mind which in the exact sciences are so useful to him, in some measure disqualify him for doing justice *here*. Laplace, whose gigantic powers of analysis were equal to any thing in his own department, made but a sorry figure as a public functionary. The sagacious remark of Napoleon is well known.

When these tendencies of mind strongly exist, or have been unduly indulged by a too exclusive pursuit of the severe or exact sciences, the obvious remedy is to lose no time in familiarizing the mind, at least in some degree, with the nature and objects of moral science. At all events, before presuming on the strength of such habits as those just mentioned, to dogmatize on a theme so awful and so unspeakably important as the Christian evidences, it is the unquestionable duty of the philosopher fairly to investigate them. If he will

not do so, his conduct will as well merit the rebuke of Apelles to the too critical cobbler, as would that of some eminent lawyer, who profoundly ignorant of astronomy, should venture an opinion on the Copernican theory: they may both be reminded that their knowledge of one subject, does not entitle them to dogmatize on another of which they are ignorant.

If the above remarks be correct, then—so far as the authority of the votaries of physical science, on a subject with which, by the structure of their minds and their habits of thought, they are too often but ill-qualified to judge; we say so far as the authority of such men is *at all* decisive of the question of the truth of Christianity—the appeal should be made to the opinion of those amongst them who have been distinguished for that vastness and comprehensiveness of mind which could not be confined within the boundaries of any one science, and whose profound acquaintance with many other departments of human knowledge entitles their judgment to respect; not surely to those men whose native tendencies and all whose habits make them great mathematicians, or great astronomers, or great physiologists, or great chemists, but *nothing more*. Now what would be the issue of such an appeal? We should be well content that Christianity should abide it; for amongst this class of philosophers, Christianity has found many of her warmest friends. If we loo'

to these men, equally distinguished by their comprehensiveness of mind and prodigious knowledge; if, in a word, we appeal to such men as Newton, or Leibnitz, or Bacon, or Boyle, who were most distinguished, it is true, as philosophers, but who were also a great deal more than philosophers, the argument is triumphant. Authority, at best an indecisive and dubious argument, is altogether with us. For shall we for a moment compare with such large and full-orbed minds,—minds which possessed in perfection all the attributes of lofty intellect,—those defective, and if the expression may be used, those mutilated intellects which may be capable of the highest achievements in some specific branch of science, but are limited by that? Shall we compare the mind of Newton, for example, with such a mind as that of Laplace on such a question as this? Surely not. On the other hand it is almost uniformly found, that it is the *mere* mathematician, or the *mere* astronomer, or the *mere* physiologist, who doubts of Christianity; that is, the man who has no business to venture an opinion at all on the subject, until he has carefully studied it.

Let then the youthful enthusiasts of science remember, that no degree of knowledge on one subject will qualify them for pronouncing on another of which they are ignorant; that such conduct is in utter and reckless defiance of all the principles of that philosophy they pretend to reverence; that

if in forgetfulness of their character as philosophers, they *will* on this subject appeal to that argument from authority, which on other subjects they despise; it at least becomes them to defer to the opinions of those men whose comprehensiveness of intellect and whose extent of knowledge best qualified them to form a judgment; and lastly, that if they act upon this principle, they cannot but admit that all those names in science which they are bound most to venerate, are associated with the belief of CHRISTIANITY.

How far the honourable Robert Boyle was qualified by nature and by habit, by the structure of his mind and by the degree of his knowledge, to form an opinion on this subject, has been already shown in a former part of this Essay: what that opinion was, will be best seen by a perusal of the present selection.

Of the pieces which compose the present volume, it is not necessary to say more than a few words. The "Considerations on the Style of the Scriptures," though placed last for the sake of preserving a natural arrangement, is by many degrees superior to the other two pieces. Though it is, after all, but a fragment of a work projected on a much larger scale; though it was commenced, and for the most part written at a very early age; though, as his "Prefatory Letter to the Publisher" shows, it was both composed and published under the most disadvantageous circumstances; still it is a per-

formance of great power, originality, and beauty. There are, it is true, in the style, some few traces of a juvenile and unripe taste, but these are not very frequent. Taken altogether, the work is the most finished of the author's theological productions; and in many parts, as he confesses, cost him far more time, and was elaborated with far greater care than any of the rest. It has well repaid the pains expended on it. It indicates a thorough knowledge of Scripture, not only considered as a collection of separate treatises, but as a coherent system of truth; it contains many profound and beautiful views of the *philosophy* of the Bible—of the reasons of its being thrown into such a form and contexture; it displays, in every part, an astonishing superiority to the prejudices which fettered the interpreters of the Scripture in that day, and in one or two instances even anticipates the spirit and the principles of modern biblical criticism. This superiority to many of the prejudices which beset the biblical critics of the age, was to be expected from one of his catholic, enlightened, and philosophical spirit; from one who was not confined within the little limits of a system; who had no preconceived hypothesis to support; and who read the Scripture, not only with the advantage of a thorough critical apparatus, but simply with a view to ascertain its meaning.[1]

[1] This little work also displays, in many parts, a knowledge

The first treatise in the volume, entitled, "The Veneration Man's Intellect owes to God," was written with much haste; and though possessing many passages both of force and beauty, it is, on the whole, far inferior to that just mentioned. That some few of the alleged facts, by which he illustrates the divine wisdom and power, are not correctly stated, will easily be forgiven by those who recollect the vast progress which natural philosophy has made since his time. That they do not affect the conclusiveness of his reasoning need hardly be stated; since, so far as he has in these instances failed of the truth, he has, in fact, only *understated his own argument*, every addition to science being a confirmation of all the grand truths of natural religion. Thus, for example, the stupendous proofs which he has brought forward of the divine power and wisdom from the consideration of astronomy, would derive far greater force, if the splendid discoveries which have taken place since he wrote the tract in question, were substituted for his own defective statements. The argument, as Paley has justly remarked, is *cumulative;* every fresh acquisition of science is continually adding to the pile.

The following is the Author's apology for the unfinished and fragmentary .orm in which this tract

of the philosophy of rhetoric, and of the higher principles of eloquence not often seen in writers of that period.

OF THE

HIGH VENERATION, &c.

1. Upon this occasion, I shall take leave to declare, that it is not without some indignation, as well as wonder, that I see many men, and some of them divines too, who little considering what God is, and what themselves are, presume to talk of him and his attributes as freely and as unpremeditately as if they were talking of a geometrical figure, or a mechanical engine. So that even the less presumptuous discourse as if the nature and perfections of that unparalleled Being were objects that their intellects can grasp; and scruple not to dogmatise about those abstruse subjects, as freely as about other things that are confessedly within the reach of human reason, or perhaps are to be found among the more familiar objects of sense.

2. The presumption and inconsiderateness of these men might be manifested by divers considerations, if I had leisure to insist on them; but at present I shall employ but these two: 1. That it

is probable God may have divers attributes, and consequently perfections, that are as yet unknown to us; and 2. That of those attributes that we have already some knowledge of, there are effects and properties whose sublimity or abstruseness surpassing our comprehension, makes the divine cause or author of them deserve our highest wonder and veneration.

3. To begin with the first of these: whereas there are two chief ways to arrive at the knowledge of God's attributes, the contemplation of his works, and the study of his word; I think it may be doubted whether either or both of these will suffice to acquaint us with all his perfections.

4. For, first, though philosophers have rationally deduced the power, wisdom, and goodness of God from those impresses of them that he hath stamped upon divers of his visible works, yet since the divine attributes which the creatures point at, are those whereof themselves have some, though but imperfect, participation or resemblance, and since the fecundity (if I may so speak) of the divine nature is such that its excellencies may be participated or represented in I know not how many ways, how can we be sure that so perfect and exuberant a being may not have excellencies that it hath not expressed or adumbrated in the visible world, or any parts of it that are known to us?

5. This will be the more easily granted, if we consider that there are some of those divine attributes we do know; which being relative to the creatures, could scarce, if at all, be discovered by such imperfect intellects as ours, save by the consideration of some things actually done by God. As, supposing that just before the foundations of

the visible world were laid, the angels were not more knowing than men now are, they could scarce think that there was in God a power of creating matter (which few, if any at all of the Peripatetics, Epicureans, to omit others of the ancient philosophers, seem ever to have dreamed of) and of producing in it local motion, especially considering the puzzling difficulties that attend the conception of the very nature and being of the one, and of the other. And much less (as far as we can conjecture) could the angels spoken of, have known how the rational soul and human body act upon one another. Whence it seems probable, that if God have made other worlds, or rather vortices, than that which we live in, and are surrounded by, (as who can assure us that he hath not?) he may have displayed, in some of the creatures that compose them, divers attributes that we have not discovered by the help of those works of his that we are acquainted with: but of this more hereafter.

6. I readily grant, (that I may proceed now to the second help to acquire the knowledge of the divine attributes,) that the revelations God hath vouchsafed us in the holy Scripture (which we owe to that Spirit which 'searcheth all things, even τὰ βάθη τοῦ Θεοῦ, the depths of God'[1]) have clearly taught us divers things concerning their adorable author, which the mere light of nature, either would not have shown us at all, or would have but very dimly discovered to us. But the Scripture tells us, indeed, that the promulgators of the Gospel, declared to men 'the whole counsel

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 10.

of God,[1] (as far as was necessary for their salvation,) but never says, that they disclosed to them the whole nature of God; who is said to 'inhabit an unapproachable light,'[2] which human speculations cannot penetrate. Upon which score, perhaps, it was, that the Jews would have the proper name of God to be ineffable, to signify that his nature is incomprehensible. And, though I will not adopt their opinion, yet I cannot but take notice that it is at least no mere Talmudical tradition, since we find not that either our Saviour himself or his apostles (who are introduced so frequently making mention of God in the New Testament) expressed in speaking either to him or of him, the *nomen tetragrammaton* (or four-lettered name!) But not to insist on conjecture, the Scripture itself, that brings so much light to things divine, that the Gospel is called light in the abstract, the Scripture, I say, informs us, that in this life 'we know but in part, and see things but darkly as in a glass;'[3] and that we are so far from being able 'to find out God to perfection,'[4] as to his nature and attributes, that even the ways of his providence are to us untraceable.[5]

7. These are some of the considerations that inclined me to think that God may have attributes that are not known to us. And this opinion perhaps will appear the more allowable, because of what I am going to add in answer to a weighty objection. For I know it may be alleged that, besides the two ways I have mentioned, of attaining to the knowledge of God's attributes, there

[1] Acts, xx. 27. [2] 1 Tim. iv. 16. [3] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.
[4] Job, xi. 7. [5] Rom. xi. 33.

may be a third way preferable to both the others, and that is, by considering the idea of a Being supremely or infinitely perfect; in which idea it may be alleged, that all possible perfections are contained, so that no new one can be added to it. But though I readily grant, that this idea is the most genuine that I am able to frame of the Deity; yet there may be divers attributes which though they are, indeed, in a general way contained in this idea, are not in particular discovered to us by it. It is true, that when, by any means whatsoever, any divine perfection comes to our knowledge, we may well conclude, that it is in a sense comprised in the comprehensive notion we have of a Being absolutely perfect; but it is possible that that perfection would never have come to our knowledge by the bare contemplation of that general idea, but was suggested by particularities, so that such discoveries are not so much derived from, as referred to, the notion we are speaking of.

The past considerations have, I presume, persuaded you, that God may have, as divers attributes, so divers excellencies and perfections, that are not known to us. It will therefore now be seasonable to endeavour to show you, that of divers of the attributes we do know that he hath, we men have but an imperfect knowledge, especially in comparison of that he has of them: which is not to be wondered at, since he possesses them in a manner or a degree peculiar to himself, and far transcending that wherein we men possess them, or rather some faint resemblances of them.

It would be very unsuitable to my intended brevity, and more disproportionate to my small abilities, to attempt the making this good by in-

sisting particularly on all the divine excellencies that we are in some measure acquainted with. I therefore hope it may suffice to instance two of the most known ones: God's power and his wisdom. Which two I pitch upon, as being those that men are wont to look on as the principal, and for which they have the greatest admiration and respect, because we are not able to confer them on ourselves, as we think we can divers other virtues and perfections. For every man easily believes that he may be as chaste, as temperate, as just, and in a word, as good as he pleases—those virtues depending on his own will; but he is sensible that he cannot be as knowing, as wise, and as powerful as he would. And thence he not irrationally concludes, that power and wisdom flow from, and argue an excellency and superiority of nature or condition. The power and wisdom of God display themselves by what he does in reference both to his corporeal and his incorporeal creatures.

Among the manifold effects of the divine power, my intended brevity will allow me to mention only two or three, which, though to discerning eyes they be very manifest, are not wont to be very attentively reflected on. The immense quantity of corporeal substance that the divine power provided for the framing of the universe; and the great force of the local motion that was imparted to it, and is regulated in it.

And first, the vastness of that huge mass of matter that the corporeal world consists of, cannot but appear stupendous to those that skilfully contemplate it. That part of the universe which has been already discovered by human eyes, assisted with dioptrical glasses, is almost inconceivably

vast, as will be easily granted, if we assent to what the best astronomers, as well modern as ancient, scruple not to deliver. The fixed stars of the first magnitude, that to vulgar eyes look but like shining spangles, are by artists affirmed to exceed, each of them, above a hundred times in bigness the whole globe of the earth: and as little as these twinkling stars appear to our naked eyes, they do (which probably you will think strange) appear much less through our telescopes, which taking off those false lights that make them look to our maimed sight as they are wont to be painted, show them little otherwise than as specks or physical points of light. And the sun, which is granted to be some millions of miles nearer to us than the other fixed stars are, though it seem at this lesser distance not to be half a foot broad, is, by the generality of mathematicians, believed to be above a hundred and threescore times bigger than the earth. Nay, according to the more recent calculations of some more accurate modern artists, it is estimated to be eight or ten thousand times as big as the terraqueous globe, and by further observation, may perhaps be fouud yet much vaster. And it plainly appears by the parallaxes and other proofs, that this globe of earth and water that we inhabit, and often call the world, though it be divided into so many great empires, and kingdoms, and seas, and though, according to the received opinion, it be 5,400 German leagues in circuit, and consequently contain 10,882,080,000 cubic miles in solid measure, and according to the more modern observations have a greater circumference, (amounting to above 26,000 miles,) yet this globe, I say, is so far from being, for its bulk,

a considerable part of the universe, that without much hyperbole, we may say that it is in comparison thereof, but a physical point; nay, those far greater globes of the sun and other fixed stars, and all the solid masses of the world to boot, if they were reduced into one, would perhaps bear a less proportion to the fluid part of the universe than a nut to the ocean. Which brings into my mind the sentence of an excellent modern astronomer, that the stars of the sky, if they were crowded into one body and placed where the earth is, would, if that globe were placed at a fit distance, appear to us no bigger than a star of the first magnitude now does. And after all this, I must remind you that I have been hitherto speaking but of that part of the corporeal universe that has been already seen by us. And therefore I must add, that as vast as this is, yet all that the eye, even when powerfully promoted by prospective tubes, hath discovered to us, is far from representing the world of so great an extent as I doubt not but more perfect telescopes hereafter will do; and even then the visible part of the world will be far enough from reaching to the bounds of the universe, to which the Cartesians and some other modern philosophers will not allow men to set any, holding the corporeal world to be (as they love to speak) indefinite, and beyond any bounds assignable by us men.

8. From the vast extent of the universe, I now proceed to consider the stupendous quantity of local motion, that the divine power has given the parts of it, and continually maintains in it. Of this we may make some estimate by considering with what velocity some of the greater bodies

themselves are moved, and how great a part of the remaining bodies of the universe, is also, though in a somewhat differing way, endowed with motion.

As for the first of these, the least velocity that I shall mention, is that which is afforded by the Copernican hypothesis, since according to that, it is the earth that moves from west to east about its own axis (for its other motions concern not this discourse) in four and twenty hours. And yet this terraqueous globe, which we think so great that we commonly call it the world, and which, as was lately noted, by the more recent computations of mathematicians, is concluded to contain six or seven and twenty thousand miles in circuit; some part of this globe, I say, moves at such a rate, that the learned Gassendus confesses, that a point or place situated in the equator of the earth, does in a second minute move about two hundred toises or fathoms; that is, twelve hundred feet; so that a bullet, when shot out of a cannon, scarce flies with so great a celerity.

9. But, as I was saying, the motion of the earth is the least swift that I had to mention, being indeed scarce comparable to the velocity of the fixed stars, if with the generality of astronomers we suppose them to move in four and twenty hours about the earth. For supposing the distance assigned by the famous Tycho (a more accurate observer than his predecessors) between us and the firmament to be fourteen thousand semi-diameters of the earth, a fixed star in the equator does, as Mullerius calculates it, move 3,153,333 miles in an hour, and consequently in a minute of an hour, fifty-two thousand five hundred and fifty-five miles, and in a second, (which is reckoned

to be near about a single pulsation or stroke of the artery of a healthy man,) eight hundred and seventy-five miles; which is about, if not above, three thousand times faster than a cannon-bullet moves in the air. It is true that, according to the Ptolomean hypothesis, a fixed star in the equinoctial doth in a second move, at most, but three semi-diameters of the earth; but according to the learned and diligent Ricciolus,[1] this velocity (of our fixed stars) is fifty times greater than in the Ptolomean hypothesis, and threescore and ten times greater than in the Tichonian hypothesis; for according to Ricciolus, such a fixed star as we speak of moves in a second minute (or one beating of the pulse) 167,282 German leagues, which amount to 629,128 English miles.

And now I shall add (what possibly you have not observed) that that portion of the universe which commonly passes for *quiescent*, and yet has motion put into it, is so great, that, for aught I know, the quantity of motion distributed among these seemingly quiescent bodies, may equal, if not exceed the quantity of motion the first mover has communicated to the fixed stars themselves, though we suppose them whirled about the earth with that stupendous swiftness that the Ptolomeans and Tychonians attribute to them; for I reckon that the fixed stars and planets, or if you please, all the mundane globes, whether lucid or opacous, of which last sort is the earth, do all of them together bear but a small proportion to the interstellar part of the universe; and though I should allow all these globes to be solid, notwithstanding

[1] See Ricciol. Almag. nov. lib. ix. sect. iv. cap. 6.

that it can scarce be proved of any of them, and the Cartesians think the sun (which they take to be a fixed star, and therefore probably of the same nature with the rest) to be extremely fluid, though I should, I say, grant this, yet it must be confessed, that each of these solid globes swims in an ambient fluid of very much greater extent than itself is; so that the fluid portion of the universe will in bulk almost incomparably exceed the solid. And if we consider what is the nature of a fluid body, as such we shall find that it consists in having its minute parts perpetually and variously moved, some this way and some that way, so that though the whole body of a liquor seems to be at rest, yet the minute parts that compose that liquor are in a restless motion, continually shifting places amongst themselves, as has been amply shown in a late Tract, entitled the History of Fluidity and Firmness.

10. And because the quantity of motion shared by the corpuscles that compose fluid bodies is not usually reflected on even by philosophers, it will not be here amiss to add that how great and vehement a motion the parts of fluid bodies (perhaps when the aggregates of those particles appear quiescent) may be endowed with, we may be assisted to guess, by observing them when their ordinary motions happen to be disturbed, or to be extraordinarily excited by fit conjunctures of circumstances: this may be observed in the strange force and effects of boisterous winds and whirlwinds, which yet are but streams and whirlpools of the invisible air, whose singly insensible parts are by accidental causes determined to have their motion made either in a straight or almost straight

line, or, as it were, about a common centre. But an instance much more conspicuous may be afforded by a mine charged with gunpowder, where the flame or some subtle æthereal substance that is always at hand in the air, though both one and the other of them be a fluid body, and the powder perhaps be kindled but by one spark of fire, exerts a motion so rapid and furious as in a trice is able to toss up into the air whole houses and thick walls, together with the firm soil, or perchance solid rocks, they were built upon.

11. But since the velocity of these discharged flames may be guessed at by that which the flame of gunpowder impresses on a bullet shot out of a well-charged gun, which the diligent Mersennus, who made several trials to measure it, defines to be about seventy-five toises, or fathoms (that is, four hundred and fifty foot) in a second, being the sixtieth part of a minute: if we admit the probable opinion of the Cartesians, that the earth and divers other mundane globes, as the planets, are turned about their own axis by the motion of the respective æthereal vortices or whirlpools in which they swim, we shall easily grant that the motion of the celestial matter that moves, for instance, upon the remote confines of the earth's vortex, is by a vast excess, more rapid than that of the surface of the earth. And yet we formerly observed, that a place situated under the equator does (if the earth turns about its own axis) move as swiftly as a bullet shot out of a cannon. But if we choose rather the Tychonian hypothesis, which makes the firmament, with all the vast globes of light that adorn it, to move about their common centre in twenty-four hours, the motions

of the celestial matter must be allowed a far greater, and indeed a scarce imaginable rapidity.

These things are mentioned, that we may have the more enlarged conceptions of the power as well as wisdom of the great Creator, who has both put so wonderful a quantity of motion into the universal matter, and maintains it therein, and is able not only to set bounds to the raging sea, and effectually say to it, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed,' but what is far more, so to curb and moderate those stupendously rapid motions of the mundane globes and intercurrent fluids, that neither the unwieldiness of their bulk, nor celerity of their motions, have made them exorbitate or fly out, and this for many ages, during which no watch, for a few hours, has gone so regularly. The sun, for instance, moving without swerving, under the same circular line, that is called the ecliptic; and if the firmament itself, whose motion in the vulgar hypothesis is by much the most rapid in the world, do fail of exactly completing its revolution in twenty-four hours, that retardation is so regulated, that since Hipparchus's time, who lived two thousand years ago, the first star in Aries, which was then near the beginning of it, is not yet come to the last degree of that sign.

12. After what hath been discoursed of the power of God, it remains that I say something about his wisdom, that being the attribute to which those that have elevated understandings are wont to pay the highest veneration, when they meet it even in men, where yet it is still but very imperfect.

The wisdom of God which Saint Paul some-

where justly styles πολυποίκιλος,[1] manifold or multifarious, is expressed in two differing manners or degrees; for sometimes it is so manifestly displayed in familiar objects, that even superficial and almost careless spectators may take notice of it; but there are many other things wherein the treasures of wisdom and knowledge[2] may be said to be hid, lying so deep that they require an intelligent and attentive considerer to discover them; but though I think I may be allowed to make this distinction, yet I shall not solicitously confine myself to it; because in several things both these expressions of the divine wisdom may be clearly observed.

Those objects of this wisdom that we shall at this time consider are of two sorts, the material and visible, and the invisible and immaterial creatures of God.

In the first of these, whose aggregate or collection makes up the corporeal world, commonly called universe, I shall briefly take notice of the excellent contrivance of particular bodies; of the great variety and consequently number of them; of their symmetry, as they are parts of the world; and of the connexion and dependence they have in relation to one another; and though under the two first of these heads, I might as well as under the other two, take notice of many inanimate bodies, as well as of those that are endowed with vegetative and sensitive souls, (as naturalists commonly call them,) yet for brevity sake I shall here take notice only of that more perfect sort of living creatures that we call animals.

[1] Ephes. iii. 10. [2] Col. ii. 3.

13. I. The contrivance of every animal, and especially of a human body, is so curious and exquisite, that it is almost impossible for any body that has not seen a dissection well made and anatomically considered, to imagine or conceive how much excellent workmanship is displayed in that admirable engine; but of this having discoursed elsewhere more fully, I shall here only tell you in a word, (and it is no hyperbole,) that as St. Paul said on another occasion, 'That the foolish things of God are wiser than men, and the weak things of God stronger than men;'[1] so we may say, that the meanest living creatures of God's making, are far more wisely contrived than the most excellent pieces of workmanship that human heads and hands can boast of. And no watch nor clock in the world is any way comparable for exquisiteness of mechanism, to the body of even an ass or a frog.

14. II. But God's wisdom is recommended as well by the variety, and consequently the number of the kinds of living creatures as by the fabric of each of them in particular; for the skill of human architects and other artists is very narrow, and for the most part limited to one or to a few sorts of contrivements. Thus many an architect can build a house well that cannot build a ship: and (as we daily see) a man may be an excellent clock-maker that could not make a good watch, and much less contrive well a fowling-piece or a windmill.

15. But now the great author of nature has not only created four principal sorts of living engines,

[1] 1 Cor. i. 25.

namely beasts, birds, fishes and reptiles, which differ exceedingly from one another, as the several regions or stages where they were to act their parts, required they should do; but under each of these comprehensive genera are comprised I know not how many subordinate species of animals that differ exceedingly from others of the same kind, according to the exigency of their particular natures; for not only the fabric of a beast (as a lion) is very differing from that of a bird, or a fish, (as an eagle or a whale,) but in the same species the structure or mechanism of particular animals is very unlike. Witness the difference between the parts of those beasts that chew the cud, and those that do not; and between the hog and the hare, especially in their entrails; and so between a parrot and a bat, and likewise between a whale, a star-fish, a lobster, and an oyster; (to mention no other instances;) and if with divers philosophers, both ancient and modern, we admit vegetables into the rank of living creatures, the number of these being so great, that above six thousand kinds of vegetables were many years ago reckoned up, the manifold displays of the divine mechanism, and so of its wisdom, will, by that great variety of living engines, be so much the more conspicuous.

16. III. That which much enhances the excellent contrivances to be met with in these automata is the symmetry of all the various parts that each of them consists of. For an animal, though considered in his state of entireness, he is justly looked upon as one engine; yet really this total machine (if I may so call it) is a complex thing made up of several parts, which considered sepa-

rately, may pass each of them for a subordinate engine excellently fitted for this or that particular use. As an eye is an admirable optical instrument to enable a man to see, and the hand is so well framed for a multitude of mechanical uses, that Aristotle thought fit to call it the organ of organs, or instrument of instruments; it ought therefore highly to recommend the wisdom of the great *yotser hakkol*, 'former of all things,'[1] as the Scripture styles him, that he has so framed each particular part of a man, or other animal, as not to let the skill bestowed on that, hinder him from making that part or member itself, and every other, neither bigger nor less, nor, in a word, otherwise constituted than was most expedient for the completeness and welfare of the whole animal; which manifests that this great artist had the whole fabric under his eye at once, and did at one view behold all that was best to be done in order to the completeness of the whole animal, as well as to that of each member and other part, and admirably provided for them both at once. Whereas many an excellent artificer that is able to make a single engine very complete, may not be able to make it a commodious part of a complex or aggregate of engines: as it is not every one that can make a good pump that can make a good ship-pump, nor every chymist that can build an oven for a bake-house, that can make one fit to be set up in a ship: and we see that our pendulum-clocks, that are moved with weights and go very regularly ashore, cannot yet be brought to perform their office, of constantly measuring of time, when set up in a sailing ship.

[1] Jer. x. 16.

17. IV. The fourth way by which God manifests his wisdom in his corporeal creatures is, their mutual usefulness to one another, in a relation either of dependency or of co-ordination: this serviceableness may be considered, either as the parts of the animal have a relation to one another, and to the whole body they make up, or as entire and distinct bodies have reference to or dependency on each other. To the first sort of utility belong the uses of the parts of the human body, for instance, which are so framed, that besides these public offices or functions that some of them exercise for the good of the whole, as the stomach for correcting aliments, the brain for supplying animal spirits to move the limbs and other parts, the kidneys to separate the superfluous *serum* of the blood; there are many other particular parts that have that subserviency to one another, that no despicable portion of the books of anatomy is employed in the mention of them. And divers consents of parts and utilities that accrue from one to the other, are further discovered by diseases which, primarily affecting one part or member of the body, discover that this or that other part has a dependence on it, or a particular relation to it, though perhaps not formerly taken notice of. To the second part of utility belong those parts that discriminate the sexes of animals, which parts have such a relation one to another, in the male and the female, that it is obvious they were made for the conjunction of both in order to the propagation of the species. I cannot here spend time to consider the fitness of the distance and situation of the sun, the obliquity of its motion under the ecliptic, and especially the compensations that nature makes by

one thing for another, the excess of whose qualities would else be noxious to men; as the great heats and dryness that reign in many parts of the torrid zone and some neighbouring climates, would render those countries barren and uninhabitable, as the ancients thought them, if they were not kept from being so by the etesians and the trade-winds, which blow regularly, though not always the same way, for a great part of the hottest seasons of the year, and are assisted by the length of the nights, by the copious and lasting rains that fall at set times, by the greatness of the rivers, some of them periodically overflowing their banks to great distances, and by the winds that in many places blow in the night from the land seaward, and in the morning from the sea towards the land; for these and some other such things do so moisten and refresh the ground, and contemperate the air, that in many of those climates which the ancients thought parched up and uninhabitable, there are large kingdoms and provinces that are both fruitful and populous, and divers of them very pleasant too. But, as I was saying, I cannot stay to prosecute what might be represented to show the usefulness of many of God's other sensible works to the noblest kind of them, men; but I shall rather content myself by adding a few lines, to point further at the reference that God has been pleased to make many other things have to the welfare of men and other animals, as we see that according to the usual course of nature, lambs, kids, and many other living creatures are brought into the world at the spring of the year, when tender grass and other nutritive plants are provided for their food; and the like may be observed in the pro-

duction of silk-worms, whose eggs, according to nature's institution, are hatched when mulberry-trees begin to bud and put forth those leaves whereon these precious insects are to feed, the aliments being tender whilst the worms themselves are so, and growing more strong and substantial as the insects increase in vigour and bulk.

18. There is one thing which, though it might perhaps have been more properly brought in before, must not here be pretermitted; for, besides what was lately said of the excellent fabric of the bodies of men and other animals, we may deservedly take notice how much more wonderful than the structure of the grown body must be the contrivance of a *semen animatum*; since all the future parts, solid as well as soft, and the functions and many of the actions (and those to be variable *pro re nata*) of the animal to be produced must be durably delineated, and as it were couched in a little portion of matter, that seems homogeneous, and is unquestionably fluid; and that which much increases the wonder is, that one of these latent impressions or powers, namely, the plastic or prolific, is to lie dormant, perhaps above thirty or forty years, and then to be able to produce many more such engines as is the animal itself.

I have hitherto, among the corporeal works of God, taken notice only of those productions of his power and wisdom that may be observed in the visible world; so that I may be allowed to consider further, that not only the Peripatetics, but the generality of other philosophers, believe the world to be finite; and though the Cartesians will not say it is so, but choose rather to call it indefinite, as it is elsewhere shown, their opinion

is rather a well-meant piece of modesty than a strict truth; for in reality, the world must every way have bounds and consequently be finite, or it must not have bounds, and so be truly boundless, or, which is the same thing in other terms, infinite. And if the world be bounded, then those that believe a Deity, to whose nature it belongs to be of infinite power, must not deny that God is, and still was, able to make other worlds than this of ours. And the Epicureans, who admitted no Omipotent Maker of the world, but substituted chance and atoms in his stead, taught that by reason the causes sufficient to make a world, that is, atoms and space, were not wanting: chance has actually made many worlds, of which ours is but one; and the Cartesians must, according to their doctrine of the indefiniteness of corporeal substance, admit that our visible world, or, if they please, vortex, by which I mean the greatest extent our eyes can reach to, is but a part, and comparatively but a very small one too, of the whole universe, which may extend beyond the utmost stars we can see, incomparably further than those remotest visible bounds are distant from our earth.

Now, if we grant with some modern philosophers, that God has made other worlds besides this of ours, it will be highly probable that he has there displayed his manifold wisdom in productions very differing from those wherein we here admire it; and even without supposing any more than one universe, as all that portion of it that is visible to us makes but a part of that vastly extended aggregate of bodies; so if we but suppose that some of the celestial globes, whether visible to us or placed beyond the reach of our sight, are

peculiar systems, the consideration will not be very different; for since the fixed stars are many of them incomparably more remote than the planets, it is not absurd to suppose that, as the sun, who is the fixed star nearest to us, has a whole system of planets that move about him, so some of the other fixed stars may be each of them the centre, as it were, of another system of celestial globes, since we see that some planets themselves, that are determined by astronomers to be much inferior in bigness to those fixed stars I was speaking of, have other globes that do, as it were, depend on them, and move about them; as, not to mention the earth that has the moon for its attendant, nor Saturn, that is not altogether unaccompanied, it is plain that Jupiter has no less than four satellites that run their course about him; and it is not to be pretermitted, that none of these lesser and secondary planets, if I may so call them, that moves about Saturn and Jupiter, is visible to the naked eye, and therefore they were all unknown to the ancient astronomers who lived before the invention of telescopes. Now, in case there be other mundane systems, if I may so speak, besides this visible one of ours, I think it may be probably supposed that God may have given peculiar and admirable instances of his unexhausted wisdom in the contrivance and government of systems, that for aught we know may be framed and managed in a manner quite differing from what is observed in that part of the universe that is known to us; for besides that here on earth the loadstone is a mineral so differing in divers affections, not only from all other stones, but from [illegible] bodies that are not magnetical, that this

heteroclite mineral scarce seems to be originary of this world of ours, but to have come into it by a remove from some other world or system; I remember that some of the navigators that discovered America, took notice that at their first coming into some parts of it, though they found great store of animals and plants, yet they met with few of the latter, and scarce any of the former, of the same species with the living creatures of Europe.

19. Now in these other worlds, besides that we may suppose that the original fabric, or that frame into which the Omniscient Architect at first contrived the parts of their matter, was very differing from the structure of our system: besides this, I say, we may conceive that there may be a vast difference betwixt the subsequent phænomena and productions observable in one of those systems, from what regularly happens in ours, though we should suppose no more than that two or three laws of local motion may be differing in those unknown worlds from the laws that obtain in ours; for if we suppose, for instance, that every entire body, whether simple or compounded, great or small, retains always a motive power, (as philosophers commonly think that the soul does, when it has moved the human body, and as the Epicureans and many other philosophers think all atoms do, after they have impelled one another,) this power of exciting motion in another body, without the movent's losing its own, will appear of such moment to those that duly consider that local motion is the first and chiefest of the second causes that produce the phænomena of nature, that they will easily grant that these phænomena must be strangely diversified by springing from

principal causes so very differingly qualified. Nor (to add another way of varying motion) is it absurd to conceive, that God may have created some parts of matter to be of themselves quiescent, (as the Cartesians and divers other philosophers suppose all matter to be in its own nature,) and determined to continue at rest till some outward agent force it into motion; and yet that he may have endowed other parts of the matter with a power like that which the atomists ascribe to their principles, of restlessly moving themselves, without losing that power by the motion they excite in quiescent bodies; and the laws of this propagation of motion among bodies may be not the same with those that are established in our world; so that but one half, or some lesser part, (as a third,) of the motion that is here communicated from a body of such a bulk and velocity, to another it finds at rest, or slowlier moved than itself, shall there pass from a movent to the body it impells, though all circumstances, except the laws of motion, be supposed to be the same. Nor is it so extravagant a thing as at first it may seem, to entertain such suspicions as these; for in the common philosophy, besides that the notion and theory of local motion are but very imperfectly proposed, there are laws or rules of it not well, not to say at all, established.

20. And as for the Cartesian laws of motion, though I know they are received by many learned men, yet I suspect that it is rather upon the authority of so famous a mathematician as Des Cartes, than any convictive evidence that accompanies the rules themselves: since to me (for reasons that belong not to this discourse) some of them appear

not to be befriended, either by clear experience or any cogent reason; and for the rule that is the most useful, namely, that which asserts, "that there is always the same quantity of motion in the world, every body that moves another losing just as much of its own as it produces in the other," the proof he offers being drawn from the immutability of God, seems very metaphysical, and not very cogent to me, who fear that the properties and extent of the divine immutability are not so well known to us mortals as to allow Cartesius to make it, in our present case, an argument *à priori*. And *à posteriori* I see not how the rule will be demonstrated, since, besides that it may be questioned whether it is agreeable to experience in divers instances that might be given of communicated motions here below, I know not what experience we have of the rules by which motion is propagated in the heavenly regions of the world, among all the bodies that make up the ethereal, which is incomparably the greatest part of the universe; so that the truth of the Cartesian rules being evinced neither *à priori* nor *à posteriori*, it appears not why it should be thought unreasonable to imagine, that other systems may have some peculiar laws of motion, only because they differ from those Cartesian rules, whereof the greatest part are, at least, undemonstrated.

21. But though, if we allow of suppositions and conjectures, such as those lately mentioned, that are at least not absurd, they may conduce to amplify some of our ideas of divine things, yet we need not fly to imaginary ultra mundane spaces to be convinced that the effects of the power and wisdom of God are worthy of their causes, and not near

adequately understood by us, if with sufficient attention we consider that innumerable multitude, and unspeakable variety of bodies, that make up this vast universe; for, there being among these a stupendous number that may justly be looked upon as so many distinct engines, and many of them very complicated ones too, as containing sundry subordinate ones; to know that all these, as well as the rest of the mundane matter are every moment sustained, guided, and governed according to their respective natures, and with an exact regard to the catholic laws of the universe; to know, I say, that there is a being that doeth this every where and every moment, and that manages all things without either aberration or intermission, is a thing, that if we attentively reflect on, ought to produce in us, for that Supreme Being that can do this, the highest wonder and the lowliest adoration.

The Epicureans of old did, with some colour of reason, as well as with much confidence, urge against the belief of a divine Providence, that it is inconceivable, and therefore incredible, that the gods should be sufficient for such differing and distracting employments, as, according to the exigencies of nature's works, to make the sun shine in one place, the rain shower down in another, the winds to blow in a third, the lightning to flash in a fourth, the thunderbolts to fall in a fifth, and in short, other bodies to act and suffer according to their respective natures. Wherefore we, that upon good grounds believe that God really does what these philosophers thought impossible to be done by any agents whatsoever, are much wanting in our duty if we do not admire an all-

pervading wisdom, that reaches to the utmost extent of the universe, and actually performing what philosophers professed they could not so much as conceive, highly merits that those difficulties which they thought insuperable, and so a sufficient excuse for their unbelief, should be a powerful motive to our veneration of that transcendent wisdom that without any trouble surmounts them.

22. We have seen some displays of God's wisdom as well as power, by what we have observed in his corporeal works; but it will be easily granted that some of the divine perfections could not be so well expressed or copied upon corporeal creatures as upon the rational and immaterial soul of man and other intellectual beings, as the picture of an apple or a cherry, or the character of a number, is not capable of receiving or containing so much of an excellent painter's skill as he may exhibit in a piece wherein the passions of the mind and the laws of optics and of decency may be fully expressed. And it may well be presumed, that if we were as familiarly acquainted with God's incorporeal creatures as we are with his visible ones, we should perceive that, as spirits are incomparably more noble than bodies, so the divine wisdom employed in the government and conduct of them, is more glorious than that which we justly admire in the frame and management of his corporeal works; and, indeed, let a portion of matter be never so fine, and never so well contrived, it will not be any more than an engine devoid of intellect and will, truly so called, and whose excellency, as well as its distinction from other bodies, even the grossest and most imperfect,

can consist but in mechanical affections, such as the size, shape, motion and connexion of its parts, which can neither excite themselves into motion, nor regulate and stop the motion they once are in. Whereas true spirits, by which I here mean immaterial substances, have, by God's appointment, belonging to their nature, understanding, will, and an internal principle, both of acting so and so, and of arbitrarily ceasing from action. And though God, as the sole Creator of all substances, has, and if he please may exercise an absolute dominion over all his creatures, as well immaterial as corporeal, yet since he has thought fit to govern spirits according to the nature he has given them, which comprehends both understanding and will, to create such intelligent, free, and powerful beings, as good and bad angels, to say nothing now of men, and to govern them on those terms so effectually to make them, however they behave themselves, instruments of his glory, which multitudes of them do as subtly as obstinately oppose; to do these things, I say, requires a wisdom and providence transcending any that can be displayed in the formation and management of merely corporeal beings; for inanimate engines may be so contrived as to act but as we please, whereas angels and human souls are endowed with a freedom of acting, in most cases, as themselves please. And it is far easier for a skilful watchmaker to regulate the motions of his watch than the affections and actions of his son.

23. And here give me leave to consider, that angels, whether good or bad, are very intelligent and active beings, and that each of them is endowed with an intellect capable of almost innu-

merable notions and degrees or variations of knowledge, and also with a will capable of no less numerous exertions or acts, and of having various influences upon the understanding, as, on the other side, it is variously affected by the dictates of it; so that, to apply this consideration to my present purpose, each particular angel being successively capable of so many differing moral states, may be looked upon as, in a manner, a distinct species of the intellectual kind; and the government of one demon may be as difficult a work, and consequently may as much declare the wisdom and power of God as the government of a whole species of inanimate bodies, such as stones or metals, whose nature determines them to a strict conformity to those primordial laws of motion which were once settled by the great Creator, and from which they have no wills of their own to make them swerve.

The Scripture tells us that in the economy of man's salvation, there is so much of the manifold wisdom of God expressed, that the angels themselves desire to pry into those mysteries. When our Saviour, having told his apostles that the day and hour of his future coming to judgment, and (whether of the Jewish nation or the world, I now enquire not,) was not then known to any, subjoins, 'No, not to the angels, of heaven, but to his Father only,'[1] he sufficiently intimates them to be endowed with excellent knowledge, superior to that of men; and that perhaps may be one of the reasons why the Scripture styles the mangels of light. It also teaches us that the

[1] Matt. xxiv. 36.

good angels are vastly numerous; and that, as they are of differing orders, some of them being archangels, and some princes of particular empires or nations, so that God assigns them very differing and important employments, both in heaven and in earth, and sometimes such as oblige them, in discharge of their respective trusts, to endeavour the carrying on of interfering designs. The same Scripture, by speaking of the devil and his angels, and of the great dragon, that drew down with his tail the third part of the stars from heaven to earth, and by mentioning a whole legion of devils that possessed a single man, and by divers other passages that I shall not now insist on, giving us ground to conclude, that there is a political government in the kingdom of darkness, that the monarch of it is exceedingly powerful, whence he is styled the prince of this world, and some of his officers have the titles of principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, &c.[1] that the subjects of it are exceedingly numerous; that they are desperate enemies to God and men, whence the devil is styled the adversary, the tempter, and a murderer from the beginning; that they are very false and crafty, whence the devil is called the 'father of lies,' 'the old serpent,' and his stratagems are styled 'the wiles and depths of satan;' that their malice is as active and restless as it is great, whence we are told that our adversary, the devil, 'walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour:'[2] these things being taught us in the Scripture itself, though I shall not now add any of the inferences that may be drawn from them to my present purpose, we may rationally suppose,

[1] Eph. vi. 12. [2] 1 Pet. v. 8.

that if we were quick-sighted enough to discern the methods of the divine wisdom in the government of the angelical and of the diabolical worlds, or great communities, if I may so call them, we should be ravished into admiration how such intelligent, free, powerful, and immortal agents, should be, without violence offered to their nature, made in various manners to conspire to fulfil the laws, or at least accomplish the ends of that great theocracy, that does not alone reach to all kinds of bodies, to men, and to this or that rank of spirits, but comprises the whole creation, or the great aggregate of all the creatures of God. And, indeed, to make the voluntary and perhaps the most crafty actions of evil men and of evil spirits themselves subservient to his wise and just ends, does no less recommend the wisdom of God than it would the skill of a shipwright and pilot, if he were able to contrive and steer his ship so as to sail to his designed port, not only with a side-wind or very near a wind, as many do, but with a quite contrary wind, and that a tempestuous one too.

24. Perhaps you will think it allowable, that on this occasion I antedate what in due time will infallibly come to pass, and now briefly take some notice, as if it were present, of the diffused and illustrious manifestation of the divine wisdom, as well as justice and mercy, that will gloriously appear at the day of the general judgment, when every good Christians' eyes shall be vouchsafed a much larger prospect than that which his Saviour himself had, when he surveyed in a trice, and as it were at one view, 'all the kingdoms of the world,'[1] and shall

[1] Luke, iv. 5.

behold a much more numerous (not to say numberless) assembly, than that which is said to have consisted of all people, nations, and languages,[1] that flocked in to the dedication of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.

At that great decretory day, when the whole offspring of Adam shall, by the loud voice and trumpet of the archangel, be called together, from the remotest ages and the most distant climates in the world; when, I say, besides the fallen angels, all the human actors that ever lived, shall appear upon the stage at once, 'when the dead shall be raised, and the books shall be opened,'[2] (that is, the records of heaven and of conscience,) then the wisdom of God will shine forth in its meridian lustre, and its full splendour. Not only the occurrences that relate to the lives and actions of particular persons, or of private families, and other lesser societies of men, will be there found not to have been overlooked by the divine Providence; but the fates of kingdoms and commonwealths, and the revolutions of nations and of empires, will appear to have been ordered and overruled by an incomparable wisdom; and those great politicians that thought to out-wit Providence by their refined subtleties shall find themselves 'taken in their own craftiness,' shall have their deepest 'counsels turned into foolishness,' and shall not be able to keep the amazed world from discovering, that whilst they thought they most craftily pursued their own ends, they really accomplished God's; and those subtle hypocrites that thought to make

[1] Dan. iii. [2] Rev. xx. 12.

pretended religion the instrument of their secular designs, shall find those designs both defeated and made truly subservient to that advancement of religion, which they really never aimed at.

25. To employ and keep in order a very complicated engine, such as the famous Strasburg clock, or a man-of-war, though all the parts of it be inanimate and devoid of purposes and ends of their own, is justly counted a piece of skill; and this task is more difficult, and consequently does recommend the conduct of the performer, in proportion to the intricate structure and the number of pieces whereof the engine consists. At which rate, how astonishing and ravishing will appear that wisdom and providence that is able to guide and overrule many thousand millions of engines endowed with wills, so as to make them all be found, in the final issues of things, subservient to purposes worthy of divine providence, holiness, justice and goodness.

In short, when all the actors that had their parts in this world, shall appear at once upon the stage, when all disguises shall be stripped off, all intrigues discovered, all hearts and designs laid open, then to find that this whole amazing opera, that has been acting upon the face of the earth from the beginning to the end of time, has been so contrived and carried on by the great Author of the world and of men, that their innumerably various actions and cross designs are brought (commonly without and often against their wills) to conspire to the accomplishment of a plot worthy of God, will appear an effect of so vast and so all-pervading a wisdom as human intellects will admiringly

confess, that nothing but a divine and omniscient one could compass.

26. It is like you may have taken notice, that among the several instances I have given of the wisdom of God, I have not (unless perhaps incidentally and transiently) mentioned the economy of man's salvation by Jesus Christ; and therefore I think myself obliged to advertise you that, though for reasons to be given you, if you desire it, by word of mouth, I have thought fit, that subject which has been already handled by so many professed divines, should be left untreated of by me, who am a layman; yet I did not pretermit it upon the score of thinking it at all inferior to those other manifestations of God's wisdom that I expressly discourse of.

For I think that in the redemption of mankind, more of the divine attributes than are commonly taken notice of have their distinct agencies, and that their co-operation is so admirably directed by the divine wisdom, that an apostle may very justly call it the great mystery of godliness,[1] and that it no less deserves our wonder than our gratitude.

27. I am not ignorant that many learned divines have largely and some of them laudably treated of this subject; but I confess, I doubt whether most of them have not been more happy in their care to avoid errors about it, than skilful in their attempts to unveil the mysteries couched in it. There are in the great work of man's redemption some characters and footsteps of the divine wisdom so conspicuous, not to say so refulgent, that a believer endowed but with a mediocrity of parts

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 16.

may easily enough discern them. But there are also, in this sublime and comprehensive work, some depths of God, (to use a Scripture phrase,) and so much of the 'wisdom of God in a mystery,'[1] (that is, of the mysterious wisdom of God,) that I cannot think it an easy matter to have a mental eye, so enlightened and so piercing as to treat largely and worthily of so vast and abstruse a subject; and, indeed, when I consider that a man must know much of the nature of spirits in general, and even of the Father of them, God himself; of the intellect, will, &c.; of the soul of man; of the state of Adam in paradise, and after his fall; of the influence of his fall upon his posterity; of the natural or arbitrary vindictive justice of God; of the grounds and ends of God's inflicting punishments as a creditor, a ruler, or both; of the admirable and unparalleled person of Christ the mediator; of those qualifications and offices that are required to fit him for being lapsed man's Redeemer; of the nature of covenants, and the conditions of those God vouchsafed to make with man, whether of works or grace; of the divine decrees, in reference to man's final state; of the secret and powerful operations of grace upon the mind, and the manner by which the Spirit of God works upon the souls of men that he converts and brings by sanctification to glory;—to be short, there are so many points (for I have left divers unnamed) most of them of difficult speculation, that are fit to be discussed by him that would solidly and fully treat of the world's redemption by Jesus Christ, that when I reflect on them I am

[1] Βάθη τοῦ Θεοῦ, 1 Cor. ii. 10. ii. 7.

ready to exclaim with St. Paul, 'who is sufficient for these things;' and I am so far from wondering that the generality of divines and other writers on this subject have not fully displayed the wisdom that God has expressed in this great work, that to have been able to accomplish it in so admirable a way as God has actually contrived and made choice of, is one of the chief reasons of my admiration of the wisdom itself. And I am persuaded that, for God to reconcile his inflexible justice, his exuberant mercy, and all those other things that seemed to clash inevitably about the designed salvation of men, and make them co-operate to it, is a stupendous manifestation of wisdom, there being no problem in Diophantus, Alexandrinus, or Appollonius Pergæus, in algebra or in geometry, near so difficult to be solved, or that requires that a greater number of proportions and congruities should be attended to at once and made subservient to the same ends, as that great problem propounded by God's infinite goodness to his divine wisdom,—the redemption of lost and perverse mankind, upon the terms declared in the Gospel, which are admirably fitted to promote at once God's glory and man's felicity.

28. Though what has been said of the greatness of God's power and wisdom may justly persuade us that those attributes are divine and adorable, yet I must not deny that the representation that I have made of them is, upon several accounts, very disadvantageous: for first, there has not been said of them in this paper all that even I could have mentioned to set forth their excellency, because I had elsewhere treated of that subject, and was more willing to present you with some things I

had not said before, than trouble you with many repetitions; but if instead of so unfit a person as I, the manifestation of the divine wisdom had been undertaken by the knowingest man in the world, or perhaps even by an angel, he would find himself unable fully to make out the matchless excellency of it; for how much wisdom has been exercised by an Omniscient Being cannot be fully comprehended, or, consequently, described, but by an infinite understanding. Besides, I have considered the wisdom displayed by God in the works of his creation and providence, with respect to them, not to us; for they are excellent, absolutely and in their own nature, and would simply upon that account deserve the wonder and praises of rational beings, as they are rational; as Zeuxis justly celebrated the skill of Appelles, and modern geometers and mechanicians admire Archimedes. But in this irrelative contemplation of God's works, a man's mind being intent only upon the excellencies he discovers in them, he is not near so much affected with a just sense of the inferiority of his to the divine intellect, as he would be if he heedfully consider how much of the vast subjects he contemplates are undiscovered by him, and how dim and imperfect the knowledge is, which he has of that little he does discover. And now, lastly, to the other disadvantages with which I have been reduced to represent, and so to blemish, the divine attributes, I must add, that I have insisted but upon two of them, God's power and his wisdom, whereas we know that he has divers other perfections, as, besides those incommunicable ones, his self-experience, self-sufficiency, and independency, his goodness to all his creatures, his mercy to

sinful men, his justice, his veracity, &c.; and as I long since noted, we may rationally conceive, that he may have divers attributes and consequently divers perfections, whereof we have at present no knowledge, or perhaps so much as particular conjecture, the inexhaustible fecundity of the divine nature being such, that for aught we know, we are acquainted with but a small part of the productions of an almighty power, accompanied with an infinite wisdom, and excited to communicate itself by an exuberant goodness. And indeed I see not why we may not say that by the notion or idea we have of him, and by the help of some attributes we already know he has, we may in general conceive, that he has other perfections that we yet know not in particular, since, of those attributes that we do already know, though the irrelative ones, if I may so call them, such as his self-existence, eternity, simplicity, and independency, may be known by mere speculation, and as it were all at once, by appearing to us as comprehended in the notion of a being absolutely perfect, yet there are divers relative attributes or perfections that come to be known but successively, and as it were by experience of what he has actually done in relation to some of his creatures: as the mercy of God was not known by Adam himself before his fall, and God's fidelity or faithfulness to his promises, as particularly that of sending the Messiah in the fulness of time, was not (not to say could not be) known but in process of time, when some of them came to be fulfilled; and therefore, since some of God's perfections require or suppose the respective natures and conditions of his creatures, and the actings of some of them towards

him, as well as some of his towards them, we that cannot be at all sure that he may not have made many sorts of creatures, and have had divers relations to them according to their several states and conditions, that we are altogether unacquainted with, cannot know but that some of the attributes of God exercised towards these creatures, may remain unknown to us.

29. But whether the attributes, known and unknown, be thought to be more or fewer, it will not be denied, but that the natural and genuine result of all these divine perfections (which we conceive under distinct notions, because we are not able to see them at one view, united in God's most simple essence) must be a most glorious majesty, that requires the most lowly and prostrate venerations of all the great Creator's intelligent works: and accordingly we may observe, from some of the formerly cited texts, that the angels, who of all his mere creatures are the most excellent and knowing, are represented in the Scripture as assiduously employing themselves, not only in obeying and serving but in praising and adoring the divine majesty. The very name of angel in the original languages of the Old and New Testament, is a name of ministry, the Hebrew *malach* and the Greek ἄγγελος signifying properly a messenger. And our Saviour intimates in his most excellent pattern of prayer, that the will of God is done most obsequiously and cheerfully in heaven, since Christians are directed to wish, that their obedience there paid him might be imitated upon earth. And as they style themselves the apostles' 'fellow servants,'[1] so these celestial envoys, if I may

[1] Rev. xix. 10.

so call them, make no scruple of going upon the meanest errands, as we would think them, considering rather by whom than to whom or about what they are sent; so the first angel that we read of, to have been sent to a particular person, was employed to Hagar,[1] a wandering and fugitive female slave, ready to perish for thirst in a wilderness, to direct her to a well of water, and tell her somewhat that concerned her child. And another angel is represented as taking the part of an ass against a false prophet;[2] nay, of this glorious order of creatures in general, the Scripture tells us, that 'they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.'[3]

Though the angels are creatures so glorious in their apparitions here below, that they use to strike amazement and veneration, if not terror, even into the excellent persons they appear to,[4] (as we may learn from divers passages of the Scripture,[5] where we are told that their presence was accompanied with a surprising splendour, and one of them is represented in the Apocalypse, as enlightening the earth with his glory,[6]) and though their multitude be so great that sometimes the myriads of them, and sometimes the legions are mentioned; and elsewhere we are told of 'thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of them;' yet these celestial courtiers, that in comparison of us men are so glorious, as well as intelligent and spotless, when they appear in multitudes about

[1] Gen. xxi. 17, &c.
[2] Num. xxii. 33.
[3] Heb. i. 14.
[4] Dan. x. 9, 11, 17.
[5] Luke, i. 29.
[6] Rev. xviii. 1.

the throne of God, according to that vision of the prophet, who told the two kings of Judah and Israel, 'that he saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left,'[1] they stand not to gaze, but as the prophet Daniel expressly says, 'to minister.'[2] And in Isaiah's vision, the seraphims themselves are represented as covering their faces[3] before their great Maker, seated on his elevated throne; and we may easily guess that their employment is most humbly to adore and celebrate such dazzling majesty, by what we are told of their crying one to another, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.' This profound respect of the angels is not to be marvelled at, since, where esteem springs not from ignorance but knowledge, the greater the ability and opportunities are of having the knowledge clear and heightened, the greater veneration must be produced in an intelligent being, for the admired object, whose perfections are such, that even an angelical intellect cannot fully reach them, since as a line by being never so much extended in length cannot grow a surface, so neither can created perfections be by any ideas so stretched as to be amplified into divine ones, or ideas equal to them; and, indeed, speaking in general, the creatures are but umbratile (if I may so speak) and arbitrary pictures of the great Creator, of divers of whose perfections, though they have some signatures, yet they are but such as rather give the intellect rise and occasions to take notice

[1] King, xxii. 19. [2] Dan. vii. 10. [3] Isa. vi. 2.

of and contemplate the divine originals than they afford it true images of them; as a picture of a watch or man, or the name of either of them written with pen and ink, does not exhibit a true and perfect idea of a thing, whose internal constitution a surface cannot fully represent, but only gives occasion to the mind to think of it, and to frame one. And what I have said of the creatures in general, holds true of the angels themselves, who by several prerogatives do indeed much surpass the rest of their fellow-creatures, but yet are but creatures, and therefore of a nature infinitely inferior to God's; as though a thousand is a far greater number than ten, and a million than a thousand, yet the latter as well as the two former is beyond computation distant from a number supposed to be infinite; since otherwise a finite number, that by which the lesser differs from the greater, would be able by its accession to make a finite number become infinite. But to return to what I was saying of the angels, I thought fit to mention both the nobleness of their nature, the splendidness of their apparitions, and the profound veneration and ardent devotion which they paid to their Creator; because we are wont to estimate remote things by comparison, as modern philosophers tell us, that we judge the rising or setting sun or moon, to be greater and more distant from us than when they are nearer the meridian; because when they are in the horizon we consider them as placed beyond mountains or long tracts of land or sea, that we know to be great objects, and look upon as remote ones, and yet see them interposed and consequently nearer than the celes-

tial globes; for thus since the Scripture proposes the angels to 'our imitation,'[1] the awful reverence paid to the Supreme Being by those excellent spirits, who, as St. Peter tells us, 'are greater in power and might than we,'[2] ought to admonish us of the ecstatic respect we mortals owe him, and teach us that whensoever we speak either to God or of him, we ought to be inwardly affected, and in our outward expressions appear to be so, with the unmeasurable distance there is between a most perfect and Omnipotent Creator and a mere impotent creature, as well as between a most Holy God and a most sinful man.

If the conjectures formerly proposed about worlds differing from ours, may pass for probable, then it will be so too, that God in these other systems may have framed a multitude of creatures, whose fabric and motions, and consequently whose properties and operations must be very differing from what is usually met with in our world; and the various contrivances wherein those differences consist will be so many peculiar instances, as well as productions, of the manifold wisdom of the great Former of all things,[3] or, as the original expression *yotser hackol* will bear, Maker of the whole universe. But to add something now of nearer affinity to what was last said about God's government of spirits, how much will this architectonic wisdom, if I may so call it, exerted in framing and regulating an innumerable company of differing creatures, be recommended, if the other worlds or vortexes we not long since spoke of, and the invisible part of ours, as we may call

[1] Jude, 9. [2] Pet. xi. 11. [3] Jer. li. 19.

the air and æther, be peopled with intelligent, though not visible, inhabitants? For, though the Scripture seems not to speak expressly of any more sorts of spirits than those good ones that retain the name of (the whole genus) angels, and the apostates that are commonly called devils, because these are the two sorts of spirits that it most concerns us men to be informed of; yet the Scripture, that in the history of the creation does not clearly so much as mention the production of angels, and elsewhere represents them, as well the bad as the good, of very differing orders, (as far as we can guess by the several names it gives them,[1]) the Scripture, I say, does not deny that there are any other sorts of spirits than those it expressly takes notice of; so that without any affront to it, we may admit there are such, if any probable arguments of it be suggested to us, either by reason or experience; and it seems not very likely that, while our terraqueous globe, and our air, are frequented by multitudes of spirits, all the celestial globes, very many of which do vastly exceed ours in bulk, and all the æthereal or fluid part of the world, in comparison of which all the globes, the celestial and terrestrial put together, are inconsiderable for bulk, should be quite destitute of inhabitants. I have not time to set down the opinions of the ancient, as well eastern as Grecian writers, especially the Pythagoreans and Platonists, to whose master this sentence is ascribed concerning the multitudes of demons, a name by them not confined to evil spirits, that lived in the superior part of the world, Δαίμονες ἀήριον γένος. I will

[1] Eph. vi. 12, compared with Col. i. 16.

not presume to be positive in declaring the sense of those two expressions which the Scripture employs, where speaking of the head of the satanical kingdom, it calls him 'the prince of the power of the air,'[1] (and the word air is, among the Hebrews, taken in a great latitude, and several times used for the word heaven,) and where speaking of the grand adversaries of the gospel, it styles the 'spiritual wickednesses,' or rather, as the Syriac reads it, 'spirits of wickedness,' that is, wicked spirits, not in high places, as our translators have it, but in heavenly; but though, as I was saying, I will not be positive in giving these two texts such a sense as may make them direct arguments for my conjecture, yet it seems that if they do not require, at least they may well bear, an interpretation suitable to my present purpose; and whatever become of the assertions of heathen philosophers and poets, it is very considerable what is noted by the excellent Grotius,[2] who quotes several Hebrew authors for it, that it was the opinion of the Jews, that all places from earth to heaven, even the starry heaven are full of spirits. If this be so, the wisdom and power of God must reach much further than we are commonly aware of,[3] since he has created, and does govern, such an inestimable multitude of spiritual beings of various kinds, each of them endowed with an intellect and will of its own; especially since, for aught we know, many or most of them, and perhaps some whole orders of them, are yet in a probational state, wherein they have free-will allowed them, as Adam and Eve were in Eden, and all the angels were, before some

[1] Eph. ii. 2. [2] Grot. on Eph. ii. 2. [3] On Eph. vi. 12.

of them, as the Scripture speaks, left their first estate and their own mansion;[1] and if to these angelical communities we add those others of children, idiots, and madmen, of whom, though all be in a sense rational creatures, yet the first community have not attained the full use of reason, for want of age, and the two others cannot exercise that faculty for want of rightly disposed organs, the wisdom and power of God in the divine government of such various and numerous communities of intellectual creatures, will, to a considering man, appear the more illustrious and wonderful.

31. The distance betwixt the infinite Creator and the creatures, which are but the limited and arbitrary productions of his power and will, is so vast, that all the divine attributes or perfections do, by unmeasurable intervals, transcend those faint resemblances of them, that he has been pleased to impress, either upon other creatures or upon us men. God's nature is so peculiar and excellent, that there are qualities which, though high virtues in men, cannot belong to God, or be ascribed to him without derogation; such as are temperance, valour, humility, and divers others, which is the less to be wondered at, because there are some virtues, as chastity, faith, patience, liberality, that belong to man himself only in his mortal and infirm condition. But whatever excellencies there be that are simply and absolutely such, and so may, without disparagement to his matchless nature, be ascribed to God, such as are eternity, independency, life, understanding, will, &c. we may be sure that he possesses them, since he is the original author of all the degrees or resemblances we men

[1] Jude, 6.

have of any of them. And the Psalmist's ratiocination is good:[1] 'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?'[1] since all the perfections communicated to, or to be found in the creatures, whether men, angels, or any other, being emanations of the divine excellencies, do as much belong to God, as in a bright day all the luminous beams that are to be found in the air belong to the sun, in whom they are united, and from whom they all proceeded. The vast difference then between the perfections of the great Creator, and those that are analogous to them in the creatures, reaches to all the perfections that are, though in very differing manners, to be found in both; but yet the human understanding, as it values itself upon nothing more than wisdom and knowledge, so there is nothing that it esteems and reverences more in other beings, and is less willing to acknowledge itself surpassed in; for which reason, as I have in the foregoing part of this paper inculcated by more than one way, the great superiority of God's intellect to man's, so I think it not improper to prosecute the same design, by mentioning to you some few particulars whereby that superiority may manifestly appear. We may then consider, that besides that God knows an innumerable company of things that we are altogether unacquainted with, since he cannot but know all the creatures he has made, whether visible or invisible, corporeal or immaterial, and what he has enabled them to do, according to that of St. James, 'known unto

[1] Psalm xciv. 9, 10.

God are all his works from the beginning of the world;'[1] nay, since he cannot but know the extent of his own infinite power, he cannot but know numberless things as possible, that he has not yet made, nor perhaps ever will please to make. But to confine myself to things actually existent, besides his corporeal and immaterial creatures and their faculties or powers, whereof we have some kind of notice, and besides perhaps multitudes of other things whereof we have no particular idea or conjecture; he knows those things whereof we men have also some knowledge, in a manner or degree peculiar to himself; as what we know but in part, he knows fully; what we know but dimly, he knows clearly; and what we know but by fallible mediums, he knows most certainly.

32. But the great prerogative of God's knowledge is, that he perfectly knows himself: that knowledge being not only 'too wonderful for a man,' as even an inspired person confesses touching himself, but beyond the reach of an angelical intellect since fully to comprehend the infinite nature of God, no less than an infinite understanding is requisite; and for the works of God, even those that are purely corporeal, (which are therefore the nearest,) our knowledge of these is incomparably inferior to his; for though some modern philosophers have made ingenious attempts to explain the nature of things corporeal, yet their explications generally suppose the present fabric of the world, and the laws of motion that are settled in it; but God knows particularly both why and how the universal matter was first

[1] Acts, xv. 18.

contrived into this admirable universe, rather than a world of any other of the numberless constructions he could have given it, and both why those laws of motion, rather than others, were established, and how senseless matter, to whose nature motion does not at all belong, comes to be both put into motion, and qualified to transfer it according to determinate rules, which itself cannot understand; but when we come to consider the particular and more elaborate works of nature, such as the seeds or eggs of living creatures, or the texture of quicksilver, poisons, antidotes, &c. the ingenious confess their ignorance, (about the manner of their production and operations,) and the confident betray theirs. But it is like we men know ourselves better than what is without us; but how ignorant we are at home, if the endless disputes of Aristotle and his commentators and other philosophers about the human soul, and of physicians and anatomists about the mechanism and theory of the human body, were not sufficient to manifest it, it were easy to be shown (as it is in another paper[1]) by the very conditions of the union of the soul and body, which, being settled at first by God's arbitrary institution, and having nothing in all nature parallel to them, the manner and terms of that strange union is a riddle to philosophers, but must needs be clearly known to him that alone did institute it, and, all the while it lasts, does preserve it. And there are several advantages of the divine knowledge, above that of man, that are not here to be pretermitted. For first, we

[1] The title of this paper is, 'The Imperfection of Human Knowledge manifested by its own Light.'

men can perceive and sufficiently attend but to few things at once, according to the known saying,

"Pluribus intentus, minor est, ad singula sensus."

And it is recorded as a wonder of some great men among the ancients, that they could dictate to two or three secretaries at once. But God's knowledge reaches at once to all that he can know: his penetrating eyes pierce quite through the whole creation at one look; and, as an inspired penman declares, 'There is no creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked,'[1] and (if I may so render the Greek word) extraverted to his eyes.[2] He always sees incomparably more objects at one view than the sun himself endued with sight could do: for God beholds at once all that every one of his creatures, whether visible or invisible to us, in the vast universe, either does or thinks. Next, the knowledge of God is not a progressive or discursive thing, like that acquired by our ratiocinations, but an intuitive knowledge; since, though we men, by reason of the limitedness and imperfections of our understandings, are fain to make the notice we have of one thing a step and help to acquire that of another, which to us is less known, as may easily be observed even in the forms of syllogisms; yet God, whose knowledge as well as his other attributes are infinitely perfect, needs not know any one thing by the help of another; but knows every thing in itself, as being the author of it: and all things being equally known to him, he can by looking, if I may so speak, into himself, see there, as in a divine and universal looking-glass, every thing that is knowable most distinctly and yet all

[1] Heb. iv. 13. [2] τετραχηλισμένα.

at once. Thirdly, God knows men's most secret thoughts and intentions: whence he is called, Καρδιαγνώστης, and the 'searcher of all hearts, that understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts;'[1] nay, he knows men's 'thoughts afar off,'[2] and even never vented thoughts, which the man himself may not know; for not only St. John says, 'that if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things;'[3] but God enabled Daniel to declare to Nebuchadnezzar, the whole series of the prophetic dream, whereof that monarch's own memory could not retrieve any part.[4] And here give me leave to observe, what perchance you have not minded, that even of a thing that happens to a man's self, and is of a nature capable to make the most vivid impressions on him, God's knowledge may surpass his; since St. Paul, speaking of his being caught up into Paradise, after having twice said, 'Whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell,' he both times subjoins, that 'God knows.'[5] Our knowledge of ourselves, as well as that of those other creatures that are without us, being so defective, the confidence of some that dare to pretend to know God fully, by the light of their natural reason, will not hinder me from taking hence a rise to ask this short question, 'How imperfect must mere philosophers' knowledge of God's nature be, since they know him but by his works, and know his works themselves but very imperfectly!' The other and fourth conspicuous prerogative of the divine knowledge, is the

[1] 1 Chr. xxviii. 9. [2] Psal. cxxxix. 2. [3] 1 John, iii. 20.
[4] Dan. ii. 5, 31. [5] 2 Cor. xii. 2, 3, 4.

prescience of future contingents, that depend upon the determinations and actions of free agents: for we men are so far from being able to stretch our knowledge to the discovery of that sort of events, that the greatest clerks have tried their wits in vain to discover how God himself can foreknow them; and therefore too many, even among Christians, deny that he can, though by divers accomplished predictions recorded in Scripture, it manifestly appears that he does.

33. When I consider the transcendent excellency and the numerous prerogatives of the Deity, I cannot without wonder, as well as trouble, observe, that rational men professing Christianity, and many of them studious too, should wilfully, and perhaps contemptuously, neglect to acquire or reflect on those notices that are apt to increase their knowledge of God, and consequently their veneration for him. To aspire to a further knowledge of God, that we may the better adore him, is a great part both of man's duty and his happiness. God who has put into men an innate desire of knowledge, and a faculty to distinguish the degrees of excellency in differing notices, and to relish those most, that best deserve it, and has made it his duty to search and inquire after God, and to love him above all things, would not have done this, if he had not known that those that make a right use of their faculties, must find him to be the noblest object of the understanding, and that which most merits their wonder and veneration. And, indeed, what can be more suitable to a rational creature than to employ reason to contemplate that divine Being, which is both the author of its reason, and the noblest object, about

which it can possibly be employed? The knowledge of some dead language, or some old rusty medal, or the opinions and customs of some nations or sects, that did not perhaps reason nor live any better than we do now, are thought worthy of curiosity, and even of the laborious industry of learned men; and the study of things merely corporeal, gains men the honourable title of philosophers: but whatever these objects of inquiry be in themselves, it is certain the greatest discoveries we can make of them are but trifles in comparison of the 'excellency of the knowledge of God,' which does as much surpass that of his works as he himself does them: and it is the prerogative of his nature, to be infinitely above all that he has made, whether we contemplate the works of nature, or those of art, whereof the former are under another name, his more immediate works, and the others the effects of one of his works, and by consequence are originally his, though produced by the intervention of man. And though it be true, that on the corporeal world, God has been pleased to stamp such impresses of his power, wisdom, and goodness as have justly exacted the admiration even of philosophers, yet the great Author of the world is himself incomparably superior to all his workmanship, insomuch that, though he could have made, and always will be able to make, creatures more perfect than those he has made, by incomputable degrees of perfection, yet the prerogative of his nature will keep him necessarily superior to the excellentest creatures he can make, since the very condition of a creature hinders it from being (to name now no other of the divine attributes) self-existent and independent. It is, therefore, me-

thinks a sad thing, that we men should grudge to spend now and then a few hours in the contemplation and internal worship of that most glorious and perfect Being, that continually employs the devotion of angels themselves. This I judge probable from hence, that those blessed spirits are represented in the Scripture as celebrating, with joyful songs and acclamations, the nativity of the world; and I think they may well be supposed to have an ardent desire to obtain a further knowledge of God himself, since, as an apostle assures us, they earnestly desire to look into the truths contained in the gospel, and the dispensations of God towards frail and mortal men.

34. I know I may be told that *scrutator majestatis, &c.* and that it is a dangerous thing to be inquisitive about the nature of God; but not to urge that the Latin sentence is taken but out of an apocryphal book, I answer that the secret things of God that are to be left to himself seem to be his unrevealed purposes and decrees, and his most abstruse essence or substance, the scrutiny whereof I readily acknowledge not to belong to us: but I think there is a great difference between contemplating God out of a saucy curiosity, merely to know somewhat that is not common of him, and doing it out of an humble desire, by a further knowledge of him, to heighten our reverence and devotion towards him. It is an effect of arrogance to endeavour, or so much as hope, to comprehend the divine perfections, so as to leave nothing in them unknown to the inquirer; but to aspire to know them further and further, that they may proportionably appear more and more admirable and

lovely in our eyes, is not only an excusable but a laudable curiosity. The Scripture in one place exhorts us 'to grow' not only 'in grace,' but 'in the knowledge of Christ;'[1] and in another 'to add to our virtue, knowledge;'[2] and when Moses begged to be blessed with a nearer and more particular view of God, though part of his request was refused, because the grant of it was unsuitable to his mortal state, and perhaps must have proved fatal to him whilst he was in it; yet God vouchsafed so gracious a return to his petition, as shows he was not displeased with the supplicant;[3] no action or suffering of his having procured for him so glorious a view as was then vouchsafed to his holy curiosity.[4] And that we may aspire to great degrees of knowledge, even at those supernatural objects that we cannot adequately know, we may learn from St. Paul, who prays that his Ephesians, as all true Christians, may be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which, says he in the very next words, passeth knowledge.[5] Supposing it then lawful to contemplate God, not with design to pry into his decrees and purposes, nor to dogmatize in points controverted among the learned about his nature and attributes, but to excite in ourselves the sentiments which his indisputable perfections are by a more attentive view qualified to produce; I consider that the devout contemplation of God, besides other great advantages that it brings the mind, insomuch that the human understanding, like Moses in the Mount,[6]

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 18. [2] 2 Pet. i. 5. [3] Exod. xxxiii. 1.
[4] Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, &c. [5] Eph. iii. 18.
[6] Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30, &c.

does by an assiduous converse with God acquire a lasting luminousness;—besides this, I say, and the improving influence that this happy conversation may have upon the graces and virtues of the mind, I take it to be one of the most delightful exercises that the soul is capable of on this side heaven. It is generally acknowledged that admiration is one of the most pleasing affections of the mind, which sometimes, when the object deserves it, is so possessed thereby as to forget all other things or leave them unregarded, as it often happens in masks and other pompous and surprising shows or spectacles; and as upon a better ground it happened to St. Peter, when being ravished with the glorious transfiguration of his and our master upon Mount Tabor, he exclaimed that it was good for them to be there, and talked of building tabernacles for those that had heavenly mansions; being so transported with the ravishing sight, that the evangelist expressly notes that 'he knew not what he said.'[1] Now, the pleasure that admiration gives, being usually proportionate to the uncommon nature and endearing circumstances of the thing admired, how can any admiration afford such a contentment as that which has God himself for its object, and in him the most singular and the most excellent of all beings. The wonder produced in us by an humble and attentive contemplation of God has two main advantages above the admiration we have for any of his works or of our own. For first, when we admire corporeal things, how noble and precious soever they be, as stars and gems, the contentment that

[1] Luke, ix. 23.

accompanies our wonder is alloyed by a kind of secret reproach grounded on that very wonder; since it argues a great imperfection in our understandings to be posed by things that are but creatures, as well as we, and which is worse, of a nature very much inferior to ours: whereas it is no disparagement at all for a human, and consequently a finite intellect to be possessed with wonder, though it were heightened to amazement or astonishment, by the contemplation of that most glorious and infinitely perfect Being, which must necessarily exceed the adequate comprehension of any created intellect. But I consider that there is a further and much greater (which is the second) advantage of the admiration of God above that of other things; for other objects having but a bounded nature, and commonly but some one thing fit to be wondered at, our admiration of them is seldom lasting, but after a little familiarity with them, first languishes and then ceases: but God is an object whose nature is so very singular, and whose perfections are so immense, that no assiduity of considering him can make him cease to be admirable, but the more knowledge we obtain of him, the more reason we find to admire him; so that there may be a perpetual vicissitude of our happy acquists of further degrees of knowledge, and our eager desires of new ones. Because we give him but one name, we are apt to look upon him as but one object of speculation; but though God be indeed but one in essence or nature, yet such is his immensity, and if I may so speak, fecundity, that he is unspeakably various in the capacity of an object. Thus heaven goes under one name, but contains so many fixed stars and

planets, and they, by their diversity of motions exhibit so many phænomena, that though they have employed the curiosity of astronomers for many ages, yet our times have, in the celestial part of the world, made discoveries as considerable, if not as numerous, as all those of the ancients; and as our optic glasses have detected many fixed stars and divers planets that were unknown to former times, so our navigators, by their voyages beyond the line, have discovered divers whole constellations in the southern hemisphere. So that, though heaven be an object that has been perpetually and conspicuously exposed to men's view and curiosity for some thousands of years, yet it still affords new subjects for their wonder; and I scarce doubt but, by the further improvement of telescopes, posterity will have its curiosity gratified by the discovery both of new constellations, and of new stars in those that are known to us already. We need not, therefore, fear our admiration of God should expire for want of objects fit to keep it up. That boundless ocean contains a variety of excellent objects, that is as little to be exhausted as the creatures that live in our sublunary ocean or lie on the shores that limit it can be numbered. To the wonderful excellency of God, may be justly applied that notion which Aristotle lays down as a kind of definition of infinite, namely, that it is that of which how much soever one takes there still remains more to be taken. If the intellect should for ever make a further and further progress in the knowledge of the wonders of the divine nature, attributes, and dispensations, yet it may still make discoveries of fresh things worthy to be admired; as in an infinite series or row of

ascending numbers, though you may still advance to greater and greater numbers; yet all that you can do by that progress, is to go further and further, (from the first and least term of the progression, which in our case answers to the smallest degree of our knowledge of God,) without ever reaching, or, which may seem strange, but is true, so much as approaching to an infinite number, in case there were any such, or even to the greatest of all numbers, as will be acknowledged by those that have looked into the properties of progressions *in infinitum.*

35. The two advantages I come from mentioning, which the admiration of God has in point of delightfulness joined to the other advantages of our contemplation of him, have, I hope, persuaded you that they are very much wanting to themselves, as well as to the duty they owe their Maker, that refuse or neglect to give their thoughts so pleasing as well as noble an employment: and I am apt to think, upon this account in particular, that reason is a greater blessing to other men than to atheists, who, whilst they are such, cannot employ it about God, but with disbelief or terror; and that on this very score Epicurus was far less happy than Plato; since whereas the latter was oftentimes, as it were, swallowed up in the contemplation of the Deity, the former had no such glorious object, to possess him with an equally rational and delightful admiration.

36. But now, to apply this to the scope of this whole discourse, though so pure and spiritual a pleasure is a very allowable attractive, to elevate our thoughts to the most glorious and amiable of objects, yet it ought to be both the design and the

effect of our admiration of God, to produce in us less unworthy ideas and more honourable and reverent thoughts of that wonderful and unparalleled Being, of whom the more we discover, the more we discern him to be superior to all his works, and particularly to ourselves, who are not of the highest order of them, and who, as mere men, are scarce in any thing more noble than in the capacity and permission of knowing, admiring, and adoring God; which he that thinks a mean and melancholy employment, might be to seek for happiness in heaven itself, if so unqualified a soul could be admitted there. The genuine effect of a nearer or more attentive view of infinite excellency is a deep sense of our own great inferiority to it, and of the great veneration and fear we owe (to speak in a Scripture phrase) to this glorious and fearful name, (that is, object,) 'the Lord our God.'[1] And accordingly, when God had spoken to Job out of the whirlwind, and declared somewhat to him of the divine greatness, this holy philosopher much alters his style, and confesses that in his former discourses of God, he had 'uttered what he understood not; things too wonderful for him, which he knew not;' and having hereupon implored instruction from God, he declares how fit a nearer knowledge of him is to make a man have low thoughts of himself: 'I have heard of thee,' says he to his Maker, 'by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore,' infers he, 'I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'[2]

I know you may look upon a good part of this excursion as a digression; but if it be, it will

[1] Deut. xxviii. 58. [2] Job, xlii. 3, 4, 5, 6.

quickly be forgiven, if you will pardon me for it as easily as I can pardon myself, for finding myself in David's case, when he said, 'My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned.' As he said, 'then spake I with my tongue,'[1] so I was content to let my pen run on in so pleasant and noble a theme, and endeavour to excite, at least in myself, such a well-grounded admiration of God, as may perhaps be a part of my reasonable service to him,[2] or rational worship of him. God is pleased to declare that he that offers (or as it is in the original, 'sacrifices') praise, glorifies him;[3] and the Scripture expressly styles our devotion 'sacrifices of praise;'[4] and we may well suppose that if the calves of our lips, as our celebrations of God are somewhere called, are encouraged by God, those mental offerings that consist in high and honourable thoughts of him, and in lowly humble sentiments of ourselves in the view of his excellency, will not be less acceptable to him: such 'reverence and devout fear'[5] (to speak with the inspired writer to the Hebrews) being indeed a kind of 'adoring God in spirit and in truth;'[6] and he that is so employed, may with contentment compare his condition to that of Zacharias, when it was said of him that 'his lot was to burn incense,'[7] to offer up to God the noblest and purest sort of the legal sacrifices. But that I may not too far digress, I shall only add, that I think myself very worthily, as well as delightfully employed, when I am seeking, after bringing together what helps I can, to greaten, as much as I am able, those sen-

[1] Psal. xxxix. 3. [2] Rom. xii. 2. [3] Psal. l. 23.
[4] Heb. xiii. 15. [5] Heb. xii. 28. [6] John, iv. 23. [7] Luke, i. 9

timents of wonder and veneration for God, that I am sure can never be great enough: especially since the more we know and adore that infinite excellency and exuberant fountain of goodness, the more influence and advantages we derive from it; agreeably to which God is introduced in the Scripture, saying of one of his adorers, to whom in the same Psalm many other blessings are also promised, 'Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high because he has known my name.'[1]

We have generally, through incogitancy, or vice, or prejudices, or the majesty and abstruseness of the subject, so great an indisposition to excite and cherish in ourselves an awful veneration for God, and a studious contemplation of his adorable attributes, that it seemed no more than needful to employ variety of arguments, drawn from different topics, to engage our own and other men's minds, and repeated inculcations to press them to an exercise, which they neither are, nor are willing to be acquainted with. This consideration will, I hope, be my apology, if in the present tract I lay hold on several occasions, and make use of diversities of discourse, to recommend a duty that does very much both merit and need to be not only proposed but inculcated: and yet I will not any further lengthen this foregoing excursion, (as I hope you will think it rather than a mere digression,) nor any longer forget, that when I began it I was discoursing of the great caution and profound respect with which we ought to speak of God.

[1] Psal. xci. 14, 15, 16.

37. It were tedious to insist on all the arguments that may be brought of the immense inferiority of man's intellect to God's; and therefore I shall here content myself to illustrate some part of it by a simile borrowed from the superior and inferior luminaries of heaven: human reason, in comparison of the divine intellect, being but like the moon in reference to the sun; for as the moon at best is but a small star in comparison of the sun, and has but a dim light, and that too but borrowed, and has her wane as well as her full, and is often subject to eclipses and always blemished with dark spots; so the light of human reason is but very small and dim in comparison of his knowledge, that is truly called in Scripture the fountain as well as the Father of light:[1] and this light itself, which shines in the human intellect, is derived from the irradiation it receives from God, in whose light it is that we see light;[2] and this, as it is but a communicated light, is subject to be increased, impaired, and oftentimes to be almost totally eclipsed, either by the darkening fumes of lusts or passions, or the suspension of the provoked donor's beams, and in its best estate is always blemished with imperfections that make it incapable of an entire and uniform illumination.

Upon these and divers other considerations, I, for my part, think it becomes us men, to use an awful circumspection, not only when we make philosophical inquiries or scholastic disputes about God, that is, when we presume to discourse of him, but when we solemnly design to praise him; for it is one thing to say true things of God and

[1] Psal. xxxvi. 9; James, i. 17. [2] Psal. xxxvi. 9.

another to say things worthy of God. Our ideas of him may be the best we are able to frame, and yet may far better express the greatness of our veneration for him than the immensity of his perfection: and even those notions of them that may be worthy of the most intelligent of men, will fall extremely short of being worthy of the incomprehensible God. The brightest and least unlike idea we can frame of God, is infinitely more inferior in reference to him than a *parhelion* is in reference to the sun; for, though that meteor appear a splendid and sublime thing, and have so much resemblance to the sun, without whose own beams it is not produced, as to be readily perceived to be his image, exclusively to that of any other; yet residing in a cloud, whose station is near the earth, it is by an immense distance beneath the sun, and is no less inferior to him in bigness and splendour, as well as in many other attributes. He has, in my opinion, the truest veneration for God, not who can set forth his excellencies and prerogatives in the most high and pompous expressions; but he who willingly has a deep and real sense of the unmeasurable inferiority of himself and his best ideas, to the unbounded and unparalleled perfections of his Maker. And here indignation prompts me to this reflection, that if, as is the case, even our hymns and praises of God the Supreme Being deserve our blushes and need his pardon, what confusion will one day cover the faces of those, that do not only speak slightly and carelessly, but oftentimes contemptuously, and perhaps drollingly, of that supreme and infinitely perfect Being, to whom they owe those very faculties and that wit which they so ungratefully

as well as impiously mis-employ; and, indeed, such transcendent excellencies as the divine ones must be, might justly discourage us from offering so much as to celebrate them, if infinite goodness were not one of them. I shall not, therefore, allow myself the presumption of pretending to make as it were a panegyric of God, of whom it is very easy to speak too much, though it be not possible to say enough; contenting myself with a humble adoration of perfections whereof my utmost praises would rather express my own weakness than their excellency, since of this ineffable object the highest things that can be expressed in words, must therefore fall short because words cannot express them. Which assertion, though it be a paradox, yet I think it is not truly an hyperbole; for we are not able to determine and reach, so much as in our thoughts, the greatest of all possible numbers, since we may conceive that any one, whatsoever it be, that can be pitched upon or assigned, may be doubled, trebled, or multiplied by some other number, or may be but the root of a square or cubical number; by which instance, that perhaps you have not met with, you may perceive that any determinate conception that we can have (for example) of God's immensity (to specify now no other of his attributes) must therefore be short of it, because it is a determined or bounded conception. It is fit, therefore, that I should at length put limits to my discourse, since none can be put to the extent or perfections of my subject.

CONCLUSION.

THE result of what hath been said in the past excursion, will, I hope, amount to a sufficient justification of what hath been said at the beginning of this discourse, about 'the high veneration our intellects owe to God.' For, since we may well think in general, that he hath divers attributes and perfections of which we have no knowledge or suspicion in particular, and since of those attributes of his that are the most manifest to us, as his power and wisdom, we have but a very dim and narrow knowledge, and may clearly perceive that there is in these an unbounded extent of perfection, beyond all that we can evidently and distinctly discern of them; how unfit must such imperfect creatures as we are, be to talk hastily and confidently of God, as of an object that our contracted understandings grasp, as they are able, or pretend to be so, to do other objects! And how deep a sense ought we to have of our inestimable inferiority to a Being, in reference to whom both our ignorance and our knowledge ought to be the parents of devotion! Since our necessary ignorance proceeds from the numerousness and incomprehensibleness of his (many of them undiscovered) excellencies, and our knowledge qualifies us but to be the more intelligent admirers of his conspicuous perfections.

If we duly and impartially consider these and the like things, we may clearly perceive how great an effect and mark of ignorance as well as presumption it is for us mortals to talk of God's nature and the extent of his knowledge, as of things that we are able to look through and to measure. Whereas we ought whenever we speak of God and of his attributes, to stand in great awe, lest we be guilty of any misapprehension or misrepresentation of him, that we might by any wariness and humility of ours have avoided; and lest, by an over-weening opinion of ourselves, we presume that we have a perfect, or at least a sufficient knowledge of every thing in God, whereof we have some knowledge, since this at the least consists in such notions as are rather suited to our limited faculties, than any way equal to his boundless perfections.

That higher order of intellectual beings, the angels, though their minds be so illuminated and their knowledge so extensive, the angels themselves, I say, are in the Scripture affirmed to 'be desirous to pry into the mysteries of the Gospel,' whence we may guess how far they are from penetrating to the bottom of what the Scripture calls 'the depths of God,'[1] and how much further they are from comprehending the infinite nature of God; and, accordingly, when in the (formerly mentioned) majestic vision that appeared to the prophet Isaiah,[2] they are set forth as attendants about the throne of God, they are represented 'covering their faces with their wings,'[3] as not able to support, or not presuming to gaze on the daz-

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 10. [2] Isa. vi. [3] Ibid. verse 2.

zling brightness of the Divine Majesty; and shall we poor sinful mortals, who are infinitely beneath them, not only by the degeneracy and sinfulness of our lives, but even by the imperfection and inferiority of our nature, presume to talk forwardly or irreverently of the divine essence and perfections, without considering the immense distance betwixt God and us, and how unable as well as unworthy we are to penetate the recesses of that inscrutable as well as adorable nature; and how much better it would become us, when we speak of objects so much above us, to imitate the just humility of that inspired poet, that said, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high I cannot attain unto it;'[1] and join in that seemingly, and yet but seemingly, lofty celebration of God, 'That his glorious name is exalted above all blessing and praise.'[2]

[1] Psal. cxxxvi. 6. [2] Nehem. ix. 5.

REFLECTIONS

UPON A

THEOLOGICAL DISTINCTION.

ACCORDING TO WHICH IT IS SAID THAT SOME ARTICLES OF FAITH ARE ABOVE REASON, BUT NOT AGAINST REASON.

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

REFLECTIONS, &c.

SIR,

I CAN neither admire nor blame the curiosity you express, to receive some satisfaction about the important distinction that is made use of, in defence of some mysteries of the Christian religion; namely, that "they are indeed above reason, but not against reason." For though divers learned men have, especially of late, employed it; yet I perceive you and your friends think that they have not done it so clearly, as both to prevent the exceptions of infidels or render them more groundless; and at least, to obviate the surmises of those others, who have been persuaded to look upon this distinction but as a fine evasion, whereby to elude some objections that cannot otherwise be answered. And indeed, as far as I can discern by the authors wherein I have met with it, (for I pretend not to judge of any others,) there are divers that employ this distinction, few that have attempted to explain it, (and that I fear, not sufficiently,) and none that has taken care to justify it.

2. In order to the removal of the difficulties that you take notice of, I shall endeavour to do the

two things: I. To declare in what sense I think our distinction is to be understood; and, II. To prove that it is not an arbitrary or illusory distinction, but grounded upon the nature of things.

Though I do not desire to impose my sentiments on any man, much less on you; yet because I, as well as others, have had some occasions to make use of the distinction we are considering, I think myself obliged, before I go any further, to acquaint you in what sense I understand it.

3. By such things then in theology, as may be said to be above reason, I conceive such notions and propositions as mere reason, that is, reason unassisted by supernatural revelation, would never have discovered to us; whether those things be to our finite capacities clearly comprehensible or not. And by things contrary to reason, I understand such conceptions and propositions as are not merely undiscoverable by mere reason, but also, when we understand them, do evidently and truly appear to be repugnant to some principle, or to some conclusion of right reason.

4. To illustrate this matter a little, I shall propound to you a comparison drawn from that sense, which is allowed to have the greatest cognation with the understanding, which I presume you will readily guess to be the sight. Suppose then, that on a deep sea a diver should bid you tell him what you can see there; that which you would answer would be, that you can see into a sea-green liquor, to the depth of some yards, and no further: so that if he should further ask you, whether you see what lies at the bottom of the sea, you would return him a negative answer. If afterwards the diver, letting himself down to the bottom, should

thence bring up and show you oysters or muscles with pearls in them; you would easily acknowledge both that they lay beyond the reach of your sight, and consequently argued an imperfection in it; though but such an imperfection as is not personal, but common to you with other men, and that the pearls have the genuine colour and lustre that naturally belongs to such gems. But if this diver should pretend, that each of these pearls he shows you, is as large as a tennis-ball, or some of them bigger than the shells they were inclosed in, and that they are not round but cubical, and their colour not white or orient, but black or scarlet; you would doubtless judge what he asserts to be not only (or not so properly) undiscernible by your eyes, but contrary to the informations of them, and therefore would deny what he affirms. Because, that to admit it would not only argue your sight to be imperfect, but false and delusory; though the organ be rightly qualified, and duly applied to its proper objects.

5. This illustration may give you some superficial notion of the difference betwixt a thing being above reason, and its being contrary to it. But this may better appear, if we consider the matter more distinctly. And to offer something in order to this, I shall beg leave to say, that, in my opinion, the things that may be said to be above reason are not all of one sort, but may be distinguished into two kinds, differing enough from each other.

6. For it seems to me, that there are some things that reason by its own light cannot discover; and others that, when proposed, it cannot comprehend.

7. And first, there are divers truths in the

Christian religion that reason, left to itself, would never have been able to find out, nor perhaps to have so much as dreamed of. Such as are most of those that depend upon the free will and ordination of God; as that the world was made in six days, that Christ should be born of a virgin, and that in his person there should be united two such infinitely distant natures as the divine and human; and that the bodies of good men shall be raised from death, and so advantageously changed, that the glorified persons shall be like, or equal to, the angels.

8. Of this kind of theological truths, you will easily believe, that it were not difficult for me to offer divers other instances; and indeed there are many truths, and more I think than we are wont to imagine, that we want mediums, or instruments to discover, though if they were duly proposed, they would be intelligible to us: as, for my part, when by looking on the starry heaven, first with my naked eyes, and then with telescopes of differing lengths, I did not only descry more and more stars, according to the goodness of the instruments I employed, but discovered great inducements to think that there are, in those inestimably remote regions, many celestial lights, that only the want of more reaching telescopes conceal from our sight.

9. And thus much I presume you will close with the more easily, because it disagrees not with the sentiments of some few (for I dare say not, many) orthodox divines. But I must take leave to add, that besides these mysterious truths, that are too remote and hidden to be detected by human reason, there is another sort of things that may be said to be above reason.

10. For there are divers truths delivered by revelation, (contained in the holy Scriptures,) that not only would never have been found out by mere natural reason; but are so abstruse, that when they are proposed as clearly as proper and unambiguous expressions can propose them in, they do nevertheless surpass our dim and bounded reason, on one or other of those three accounts that are mentioned in a dialogue about things transcending reason; namely either as not clearly *conceivable* by our understanding, such as the infiniteness and perfections of the divine nature; or as *inexplicable* by us, such as the manner how God can create a rational soul; or how, this being an immaterial substance, it can act upon a human body, and be acted on by it; (which instance I rather choose, than the creation of matter, because it may be more easily proved;) or *as symmetrical,* or unsociable; that is, such as we see not how to reconcile with other things, which also manifestly are, or are by us acknowledged to be true; such as are the divine prescience of future contingents, and the liberty that belongs to man's will, at least in divers cases.

11. It will not perhaps be improper to observe, on this occasion, that, as of things that are said to be above reason there are more kinds than one; so there may be a difference in the degrees, or at least the discernibleness, of their abstruseness.

12. For some things appear to surpass or distress our understandings, almost as soon as they are proposed, at least before they are attentively looked into: as, what is said to be infinite, either in extent or number. But there are other things, the notions whereof, as they first arise from the things considered in gross, and as it were indefi-

nitely, are such as do not choke or perplex our understandings; and are so far intelligible, that they may be usefully employed in ordinary discourse. But when we come to make a deep inspection into these, and prosecute to the uttermost the successive inferences that may be drawn from them, we reason ourselves into inextricable difficulties, if not flat repugnancies too. And to show you that I do not say this gratis, be pleased to consider with me, that we usually discourse of place, of time, and of motion; and have certain general indeterminate conceptions of each of these, by the help of which, we understand one another, when we speak of them; though if we will look thoroughly into them, and attentively consider all the difficulties that may be discovered by such an inspection, we shall find our reason oppressed by the number and greatness of the difficulties into which we shall argue ourselves; or, at least, may be argued by others; though these men, who do make such shrewd objections against the hypothesis we embrace, will hardly be able to pitch on any that will not allow us to repay them in the same coin.

13. What has been newly said, may, I hope, assist us to clear a difficulty or scruple, (about the distinction we treat of,) which, since it sprung up in my own mind, may very probably occur also to your thoughts; namely, that if any theological proposition be granted to surpass our reason, we cannot pretend to believe it, without discovering that we do not sufficiently consider what we say, since we pretend to exercise an act of the understanding in embracing somewhat that we do not understand, nor have a notion of.

14. But on this occasion we may justly have

recourse to a distinction, like that I have lately intimated. For in divers cases, the notions men have of some things may be different enough, since the one is more obvious and superficial, and the other more philosophical or accurate. And of these two differing kinds of conceptions I have already offered some instances, in the very differing notions men have of place and time; which, though familiar objects, I elsewhere show to be each of them of so abstruse a nature, that I do not wonder to find Aristotle himself complaining of the difficulty that there is to give a clear and unexceptionable notion of place, nor to find so acute a wit as St. Austin ingenuously confessing his disability to explicate the nature of time.

15. And what is said of the great intricacies that encumber a deep scrutiny into these familiar objects of discourse, will hold, as to the divisibility of quantity, as to local motion, and as to some other primary things; whose abstruseness is not inferior in degree, though differing as to the kinds of things, wherein it consists.

16. By such instances as these, it may appear, that without talking as parrots, (as your friends would intimate that those that use our distinctions must do;) or as irrational men, we may speak of some things that we acknowledge to be on some account or other above our reason; since the notions we may have of those things, however dim and imperfect, may yet be of use, and may be in some measure intelligible, though the things they relate to may in another respect be said to transcend our understanding; because an attentive considerer may perceive, that something belongs to them that

is not clearly comprehensible, or does otherwise surpass our reason, at least in our present state.

17. Having dispatched the objection that required this digression, I shall now step again into the way, and proceed in it by telling you, that any one apposite instance may suffice to clear the former part of the expression that is employed, when it is said that a mystery, or other article of faith, is above reason, but not contrary to it; for if there be so much as one truth which is acknowledged to be such, and yet not to be clearly and distinctly comprehensible, it cannot justly be pretended that to make use of the distinction we are treating of, is to say something that is not intelligible, or is absurd. And it will further justify the expression quarrelled at, if we can make it appear that it is neither impertinent nor arbitrary, but grounded on the nature of things. And this I shall endeavour to do by showing, that though I admit two sorts of things which may be said to be above reason, yet there is no necessity that either of them must always be contrary to reason.

18. As for the first sort of things said to surpass reason, I see not but that men may be unable, without the assistance of a more knowing instructor, to discover some truths, and yet be able, when these are revealed or discovered to them by that instructor, both to understand the disclosed propositions by their own rational faculty, and approve them for true and fit to be embraced. The intellect of man being such a bounded faculty as it is, and naturally furnished with no greater a stock or share of knowledge than it is able by its own endeavours to give itself, or acquire; it would be

a great unhappiness to mankind, if we were obliged to reject, as repugnant to reason, whatever we cannot discover by our own natural light, and consequently, to deny ourselves the great benefits we may receive from the communications of any higher and more discerning intellect. An instance to my present purpose may be found among rational souls themselves, though universally granted to be all of the same nature. For though a person but superficially acquainted (for example) with geometry, would never have discovered by his own light that the diameter of a square is incommensurable to the side, yet when a skilful mathematician dexterously declares, and by a series of demonstrations proves that noble theorem, the disciple, by his now instructed reason, will be able both to understand it and to assent to it: insomuch, that Plato said that "he was rather a beast than a man, that would deny it."

19. Other instances may be alleged to exemplify the truth newly mentioned. And indeed, there is not so much as a strong presumption, that a proposition or notion is therefore repugnant to reason, because it is not discoverable by it; since it is altogether extrinsical and accidental to the truth or falsity of a proposition, that we never heard of it before; or that we could never have found it out by our own endeavours; but must have had the knowledge of it imparted to us by another. But then this disability to find out a thing by our own search, doth not hinder us from being able, by our own reason, both to understand it when duly proposed, and to discern it to be agreeable to the dictates of right reason. To induce you to assent to the latter part of this observation, I shall add,

that these intellectual assistances may oftentimes not only enlighten, but gratify the mind, by giving it such informations as both agree with its former maimed or imperfect notices, and complete them. When, for example, an antique medal, half consumed with rust, is showed to an unskilful person, though a scholar, he will not by his own endeavours be able to read the whole inscription, whereof we suppose some parts to be obliterated by time or rust, or to discover the meaning of it. But when a knowing medalist becomes his instructor, he may then know some much defaced letters, that were illegible to him before, and both understand the sense of the inscription, and approve it as genuine and suitable to the things whereto it ought to be congruous. And because divers philosophical wits are apt, as well as you, to be startled at the name of mystery, and suspect, that because it implies something abstruse, there lies hid some illusion under that obscure term, I shall venture to add, that agreeably to our doctrine we may observe, that divers things that relate to the Old Testament, are in the New called mysteries, because they were so under the Mosaic dispensation; though they cease to be so, now that the apostles have explained them to the world: as the calling of the Gentiles into the church of God, is by their apostle called a mystery; because, to use his phrase, it 'had been hid from ages and generations;' though he adds, 'but now it is made manifest to his saints.'[1] And the same writer tells the Corinthians, that he shows them a mystery, which he immediately explains, by foretelling, that all pious believers shall

[1] Col. i. 26; Eph. iii. 3, 5, 6.

not die, because that 'those that shall be found alive at the coming of Christ, shall not sleep, but be changed;'[1] as the other dead shall be raised incorruptible. Which surprising doctrine, though because it could not be discovered by the light of nature, nor of the writings of the Old Testament, he calls a mystery; yet it is no more so to us, now that he hath so expressly foretold it, and therefore declared it.*

20. Other instances I content myself to point at the foot,[2] that I may pass on to confirm the observation I formerly intimated; that divers things which the Scripture teaches beyond what was known, or, in probability, are discoverable by natural light, are so far from being against reason, by being, in the sense declared, above it; that these discoveries ought much to recommend the Scripture to a rational mind; because they do not only agree with the doubtful or imperfect notions we already had of things, but improve them, if not complete them. Nay, I shall venture to add, that these intellectual aids may not seldom help us to discern, that some things, which not only are above reason, but at first sight seem to be against it, are really reconcileable to reason, improved by the new helps afforded it by revelation. To illustrate this by a philosophical instance, when Gallileo first made his discoveries with the telescope, and said, that there were planets that moved about Jupiter, he said something that other astronomers could not discern to be true, but nothing that they could prove to be false. And even when some revelations are thought not only to transcend reason, but

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52. [2] See Matt. xiii. 11; Eph. v. 31.

to clash with it; it is to be considered, whether such doctrines are really repugnant to any absolute Catholic rule of reason, or only to something, which so far depends upon the measure of acquired information we then enjoy, that, though we judge it to be irrational, yet we are not sure that the thing this judgment is grounded on, is clearly and fully enough known to us. As, to resume the former example, when Gallileo, or some of his disciples, affirmed Venus to be sometimes horned like the moon; though this assertion were repugnant to the unanimous doctrine of astronomers, who thought their opinion very well grounded, on no less a testimony than that of their own eyes; yet in effect the proof was incompetent, because their unassisted eyes could not afford them sufficient information about this case. And so, when Gallileo spoke of hills and valleys, and shadows, in the moon, they were not straight to reject what he taught, but to have, if not a kind of implicit faith, yet a great disposition to believe what he delivered, as upon his own knowledge, about the figure and number of the planets. For they knew that he had, and had already successfully made use of, a way of discovering celestial objects, that they were not masters of; nor therefore competent judges of all the things, though they might well be of many, that he affirmed to be discoverable by it. And though they could not see in the moon what he observed, (valleys, mountains, and the shadows of these,) yet they might justly suspect, that the difference of the idea that they framed of that planet, and that which he proposed, might well proceed from the imperfection of their unaided sight; espe-

cially considering, that what he said of the differing constitution of what is there analogous to sea and land, did rather correct and improve, than absolutely overthrow their former notices. For he allowed the spots they saw to be darker parts of the moon, and gave causes of that darkness; which their bare eyes could not have led them to any such knowledge of. And the non-appearance of the mountainous parts of the moon in that form to the naked eye, might well be imputed to the great distance betwixt them and us, since at a far less distance square towers appear round, &c.

21. It now remains that I say something that may both make some application of the form of speech hitherto discoursed of, and afford a confirmation of the grounds whereon, I think, it may be justified. This I am the rather induced to do, because I expect it will be objected, that he that acknowledges, that the thing he would have us believe transcends our reason, has a mind to deceive us, and procures for himself a fair opportunity to delude us, by employing an arbitrary distinction, which he may apply as he pleases.

22. But to speak first a word or two to this last clause. I acknowledge that such a distinction is capable enough of being misapplied; and I am apt to think that, by some school-divines and others, it has been so. But, since there are other distinctions that are generally and justly received by learned men, and even by philosophers themselves, without having any immunity from being capable to be perverted; I know not why the distinction we are considering should not be treated as favourably as they. And however, the question at present is not, whether our distinction may pos-

sibly be misapplied by rash or imposing men; but whether it be grounded on the nature of things. To come then to the thing itself, I consider, that for an opinion to be above reason, in the sense formerly assigned, is somewhat that, as was noted in reference to the first sort of things that surpass it, is extrinsical and accidental to its being true or false. For to be above reason, is not an absolute thing, but a respective one, importing a relation to the measure of knowledge that belongs to the human understanding, such as it is said to transcend; and therefore it may not be above reason, in reference to a more enlightened intellect; such as in probability may be found in rational beings of a higher order—such as are the angels; and, without peradventure, is to be found in God; whom, when we conceive to be a Being infinitely perfect, we must ascribe to him a perfect understanding and boundless knowledge. This being supposed, it ought not to be denied, that a superior intellect may both comprehend several things that we cannot; and discern such of them to be congruous to the fixed and eternal ideas of truth, and consequently agreeable to one another, as dim-sighted mortals are apt to suspect, or to think, to be separately false; or, when collated, inconsistent with one another. But to launch into this speculation would lead me further than I have time to go; and therefore I shall content myself to offer you one argument to prove, that of things that may be said to be above reason, in the sense formerly explained, it is no way impossible, that even such an one should be true, as is obnoxious to objections not directly answerable. For I consider, that of things above reason, there may be some which are

really contradictory to one another, and yet each of them is maintainable by such arguments as very learned and subtle men do both acquiesce in and enforce, by loading the embracers of the opposite opinion with objections they cannot directly answer.

23. This I take to be manifest in the case of the controversy about the endless divisibility of quantity; as, suppose, of a straight line. For many eminent mathematicians, and a greater number of naturalists, and in particular almost all the Epicureans, and other atomists, stifly maintain the negative. The affirmative is nevertheless asserted, and thought to be mathematically demonstrated by Aristotle, in a peculiar tract; and both by his school and by several excellent geometricians besides. And yet in reality, the assertions of these two contending parties are truly contradictory; since, of necessity, a straight line proposed must be, at least mentally, divisible, into parts that are themselves still further divisible; or, it must not be so, and the subdivisions must at length come to a stop; and therefore one of the opposite opinions must be true. And it is plain to those that have, with competent skill and attention, impartially examined this controversy, that the side which is pitched upon, whichsoever it be, is liable to be exposed to such difficulties, and other objections, as are not clearly answerable; but confound and oppress the reason of those that strive to defend it.

24. I have, Sir, the more largely discoursed of the foregoing distinction, not only because I did not find myself to have been prevented by others, but because I look upon the explaining

and justifying of it to be of importance, not alone to the defence of some mysteries of the Christian religion, but, what perhaps may have escaped your observation, of some important articles of natural theology itself. For though natural religion taught divers heathen philosophers such truths as these, viz. the production of the rational soul or mind, which is an immaterial substance; the formation of the world out of the universal matter, though this action required that an incorporeal substance gave motion to a body; that God knows men's thoughts and intentions, how carefully soever they strive to hide them; and that God foreknows the events of the free actions of such men as are not to be born these many ages; though, I say, these and some other sublime truths, were by divers men embraced before the gospel began to be preached; yet when I attentively consider how hard it is to conceive the *modus* of these things, and explain how some of them can be performed; and also, how some of the divine attributes, as eternity, immensity, omnipresence, and some others, belong to God; and how some actions, as the moving of bodies, and the creation of human minds, with all their noble faculties, are exercised by him; when I consider such things, I say, I acknowledge that, to my apprehension, there are some doctrines, allowed to have been discovered by the mere light of nature, that are liable to such objections from physical principles, and the settled order of things corporeal, as, if they be urged home, will bring those that are ingenuous to acknowledge, that their intellects are but dim and imperfect, and indeed disproportionate to the sublimest and most mysterious truths; and that they cannot perfectly com-

prehend them, and answer all the difficulties that encumber them; though they find themselves obliged to admit them, because of the weighty positive reasons that recommend those heteroclite truths to their assent.

25. If you should now tell me, that, after all I have said, it is plain that the questioned distinction, if it were granted, might be of very bad consequence; as affording shelter to any unintelligible stuff, that some bold enthusiast or conceited philosophizer may obtrude under the venerable title of a mystery, above the jurisdiction of reason; and, that though the distinction were admitted, it would not be a good proof of any disputed article of the Christian religion;—if, I say, this shall be objected, I shall answer, (what in part is intimated already,) that I do not deny but that our distinction is liable to be ill employed; but that this is no other blemish than what is common with it to divers other distinctions that are without scruple admitted because they are useful, and not rejected because they have not the privilege that they can never be misapplied; and therefore, both in reference to those distinctions, and to that we have been treating of, it becomes men to stand upon their guard, and strictly examine how far the notion, or doctrine, proposed as a mystery, does require, and is entitled to, the benefit of this distinction. I shall also readily grant the greatest part of the second member of your objection; for I think it were great weakness in a Christian, to urge our distinction as a positive proof; since, though it be extrinsical to an abstruse notion, to be, or not to be, above reason; (as was just now noted to another purpose;) yet, generally speaking, that abstruseness is less fit

to bring credit to a conception, or a doctrine, than it is to make it to be distrusted. Nor are Christians such fond discoursers, as to pretend that such an article of religion ought to be believed because it is above reason, as if that were a proof of its truth; but only, that if it be otherwise well proved, it ought to be believed, notwithstanding its being above reason.

26. And this I shall represent in favour of those that believe those abstruse articles, that are clearly revealed in the Scripture, upon the authority of the divine Revealer; (who never deceives others, nor can be himself deceived;) that since, as we have lately shown by the contradictory opinions about the divisibility of quantity, some doctrines must be true, whose difficulties do not appear to be surmountable by our dim reason; and since the perfectness of God's knowledge permits us not to doubt but that he certainly knows which of the two contending opinions is the true, and can declare so much to men; it would not be a sure ground of rejecting a revealed article, to allege, that it is encumbered with confounding difficulties, and liable to many and weighty objections.

27. And, to add somewhat that may help to defend some truths of natural, and others of revealed religion; that a thing may be rationally assented to, upon clear positive evidence, though we cannot directly answer the objections that a speculative and subtle wit may devise against it, is a truth which, as important as it is to religion in general, and the Christian religion in particular, I think one may sufficiently manifest by this one instance, —that, because we can walk up and down, and so remove our bodies from place to place, by this one

argument, I say, we are justly satisfied, that there is local motion in the world, notwithstanding all the specious and subtle arguments that Zeno and his followers have employed to impugn that truth; against which they have alleged such difficulties, as have not only puzzled and perplexed, but (for aught yet appears) *nonplused* the ancient philosophers, and, I doubt those moderns too, that have attempted to give clear solutions of them.

28. If now, Sir, we look back upon what hath hitherto been discoursed, I hope you will allow me to gather thence the conclusion I aim at, which is, that there is no necessity that every notion or proposition that may be found delivered in the Holy Scriptures, that surpasses our reason, must therefore be contradictory to it; and that, in case the Christian religion be true, and its mysteries or other articles divinely revealed, it is not enough, for the confutation of any of them, to reject the expression that it is above reason, but not contrary to it, as if it involved an unintelligible or groundless distinction; for though this will not evince the truth of a mystery, since that must be established upon its proper grounds and arguments, yet it will keep it from being therefore absurd or false, because it transcends our reason; since to do so, may belong almost indifferently to a chimerical notion and a mysterious truth: and if the expression be employed to justify any thing that, though styled a mystery, is but a pretended one; the error will lie, not in the groundlessness of the distinction, but the erroneousness of the application. I am, Sir,

Your most, &c.

SOME

CONSIDERATIONS

TOUCHING THE

STYLE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

THE AUTHOR'S PREFATORY LETTER TO THE PUBLISHER.

SIR,

YOU will perhaps think it strange, that a person, obsequious enough to those he loves, should be able to hold out so long against the importunity of two such powerful solicitors, as my willingness to own a veneration for the Scripture, and my unwillingness to deny you any thing. But if you will give me leave to acquaint you with the considerations that have hitherto dissuaded me from the publication of the papers you press for, you will, I presume, rather marvel at my resolving at last to comply with your desires, than that I have been somewhat long contesting, before I could take up so opposed a resolution. First, then, the treatise of which the papers you desire make a part, was written nine or ten years ago, when my green youth made me very unripe for a task of that nature—whose difficulty requires, as well as its worth deserves, that it should be handled by a person in whom nature, education, and time have happily matched a senile maturity of judgment with a

youthful vigour of fancy. Next, the discourse I have mentioned being written to a private friend, who put me upon that task, I not only had a theme of another's choosing imposed upon me, for which he was pleased to think me much more fit than I had reason to think myself, but was, by the freedom allowable among friends, tempted to vent and express my thoughts with more negligence, than were proper to be made use of in a solemn discourse intended for public view: the contrary of which were yet very requisite for a person, who though he have, by I know not what unhappy fate, been cast upon the learning divers languages, has yet too great a concern for the knowledge of things to be a diligent or solicitous considerer of words; and so was more fit to write almost of any thing than of a style or of matters rhetorical. Besides, that my essay touching the Scripture having not been all written in one country, but partly in England, partly in another kingdom, and partly too on shipboard, it were strange if in what I writ there did not appear much of unevenness; and if it did not betray the unleisuredness and relish of the unsettledness of the wandering author, who, by thus rambling, was reduced, for want of a library, to comply with the request of his friend, who was more desirous to receive from the author apples and pears growing in his own orchard, than oranges and lemons fetched from foreign parts: whereby I was condemned not to enrich my discourse with what I might have borrowed of real and valuable from the eloquent composures of

more happy pens. But these, Sir, are not all the determents that opposed my obeying you; for besides these disadvantages with which the discourse itself was written, that part of it you demand must appear with a peculiar, as well as great disadvantage; for in an entire and continued discourse the several parts that compose it do mutually afford light and confirmation to each other; and therefore, though whatsoever I here present you touching the style of the Scripture had been written altogether in some one place of the discourse, whereof it makes a part; yet I could not dismember it from the rest without a great deal of injury, as well to it as to the rest of the treatise. But this is not the worst of my case; for though I did in one part of my essay of the Scripture more professedly apply myself to the consideration of its style; yet because divers things were interwoven even in this distinct part, which were not so fit for public view; and because that in divers of the other parts of my essay, I had here and there, frequently enough, occasion to say something of the same theme, I have been obliged, that I might obey you, not only to dismember, but to mangle the treatise you perused, cutting out with a pair of scissars here a whole side, there half, and in another place, perhaps, a quarter of one, as I found in the other parts of my discourse, longer or shorter passages, that appeared to relate to the style of the Scripture, that I might give you at once all those parts of my essay which seemed to concern that subjecct. And though I

have here and there, by dictating to an amanuensis, inserted some lines or words, to make the loose papers less incoherent, where I thought it easy to be done, yet in many others I have only prefixed a short black line, to the incoherent passages, if I found they could not be connected with those whereunto I have joined them, without such circumlocution as either the narrowness of the paper would not permit, or my present distractions (which you know are not a few) and the weakness of my eyes would not allow of. For to complete my unfitness to obey you with any thing of accurateness, I must, to obey you at all, do it both when I have other composures in the press, and when the distemper in my eyes makes me so far from daring to transcribe the papers I send you, that I might alter them according to the exigency of your design in them, that I durst not so much as read them over but with another's eyes. To which I must add, that besides all these disadvantages I have already mentioned, I cannot but foretell that the following discourse may prove obnoxious to the censures of differing sorts of readers, and particularly to those of courtiers, for too neglected, and those of critics, for too spruce a dress. By all which I presume you will be easily induced to believe with me, that I cannot expose the papers you desire so much to their disadvantage and my own, without some exercise of self-denial: since without needing much foresight I may well apprehend, that I shall hereby hazard the loss of the most part of

whatever little reputation in this nature any of my former moral or devout composures may among favourable readers have procured me.

But by this time, Sir, I suppose not only that you have left wondering at my making some difficulty to put the annexed papers into your hands, but that I owe you and my other friends an account why I now consent to a compliance with desires which such powerful considerations would dissuade my assenting to.

My first inducement then to what I do, is the favourable character that you, and some other very competent judges have been pleased to give me of these papers, and especially your thereupon pressing their publication upon me, as a duty whereto I stand obliged to those many readers whom you would have me think likely to be benefited thereby. For in such cases, where knowing and sober persons think there is a great probability of a discourse doing good, it is not impossible but that an unwillingness to have it published, may not so much proceed out of modesty, as from some secret pride, almost as unjustifiable as if a physician should refuse to come abroad upon an urgent occasion, because he has not his best clothes on, or is not carefully dressed. And therefore, when I incline to make with you a case of conscience of the matter, I think myself obliged, whatever my private apprehensions may be of the success, to do my duty, and leave events to the wise and sovereign Disposer of them. It is not that I have the vanity to expect that I shall convert obstinate and resolved

cavillers, nor much instruct the great clerks; but since I have not yet met with such a discourse as I intended mine to be; and since the greater part of the things I have written in it will not perhaps be elsewhere met with, I hope that what I have said may not be useless to those who have considered the subject I treat of less attentively than I have done; and may, if not procure a veneration for the Scripture in those that are altogether indisposed to it, yet at least increase, or confirm it in those that have already entertained it, and furnish such devout persons with something to allege on the Scripture's behalf, who are better furnished with affections than with arguments for it. And I the less scruple to allow myself such a hope, because you have been pleased to make, not only to me but to others, such a mention of the following papers, that after your preference of them to the other pieces of devotion you have seen of mine, (without excepting that discourse of seraphic love, which yet has had the luck to be so favourably entertained by readers of all sorts,) I shall confess to you, that as some of them do now appear very much dislocated and mangled, so others were penned with more care than any other of my writings about matters theological. And indeed I conceived myself obliged, in point of gratitude as well as duty, to speak as advantageously as I could of the Scripture; because, if I may without vanity make such an acknowledgment, I am sensible I have been benefited by it, and might have been much more so, if I had been as disposed to learn as the matchless book is

qualified to teach: and I confess to you also, that since the physiological writings I have been induced to publish of late, and the sort of studies to which (for reasons to be told you at a proper opportunity) I seem at present to be wholly addicted to, make many look upon me as a naturalist: and since some persons, as well philosophers as physicians, have either faultily, or at least indiscreetly given many men occasion to think that those that being speculatively studious of nature's mysteries, depart, as I often do, from the vulgar peripatetic philosophy, and especially if they seem to favour that which explicates the phænomena of nature by atoms, are inclined to atheism, or at least to an unconcernedness for any particular religion; since, I say, these things are so, I was not unwilling to lay hold of this opportunity to give a public testimony, whereby such as do not know me may be satisfied (for I presume all that do know me are so) that, if I be a naturalist, it is possible to be so without being an atheist, or of kin to it; and that the study of the works of nature has not made me either disbelieve the author of them, or deny his providence, or so much as disesteem his word, which deserves our respect upon several accounts, and especially that of its being the grand instrument of conveying to us the truths and mysteries of the Christian religion; my embracing of which I know not why I should be ashamed to own, since I think I can, to a competent and unprepossessed judge, give a rational account of my so doing.

To all this I might subjoin some apologies, which

might perhaps serve to prevent or withdraw the censures of some sorts of readers.

For to critics and philologers I could represent, partly, that I have not a little impoverished my discourse, by making use of books to shun the repetition of what I found obvious already; partly, that when I wrote the essay, of which the ensuing treatise is a piece, I had thoughts of annexing to it annotations, wherein I hoped to illustrate, and by particular instances to exemplify, divers of those things which should appear to require it; or which else the reader might suspect I have slightly considered, because I seem to make but a transient mention of them; and partly too, that I ignored not the stricter interpretations given by modern critics to divers texts by me alleged, but that (not having opportunity to criticise) I was content to use them in their received or obvious sense; and have sometimes employed them but by way of allusion, or as arguments, *ad hominem*, (wherein some of my readers are like to acquiesce, though I do not,) and sometimes rather used them to express than prove my thoughts. And indeed, in these popular discourses, which are not written for, nor to be examined as regular disputations, men use not so much to look whether every thing be a strict truth, as whether it be proper to persuade or impress the truths they would inculcate; and especially in composures of the nature of this of mine, men have been rarely censured for being sometimes even indulgent to the exigencies of their themes. Those that require more of method than they will here

find, may be advertised, that much of this scribble being designed to serve particular acquaintances of mine, it was fit it should insist on those points they were concerned in; and that, consequently, much of the seeming desultoriness of my method, and frequency of my rambling excursions, have been but intentional and charitable digressions out of my way, to bring some wandering friends into theirs, and may closely enough pursue my intentions, even when they seem most to deviate from my theme. And as for the longer excursions which either you or other judicious friends would needs have me leave here and there, I have, for the ease of my perusers, annexed to them some marks whereby they may be taken notice of to be digressions, that as I submit to their judgment, who think they may be useful to some readers, so I may comply with my own unwillingness to let them be troublesome to others, who by this means have an opportunity to pass by, if they please, such as they shall not expect to find themselves (either upon their own score or that of their acquaintances) concerned in. To those of the wits who, happening to be disregarders of the Scripture, may find themselves upon that account used here with any show of slighting or asperity, I may add to what I have already said in the papers themselves, that it hath been but as we pinch and cast cold water on the faces of persons in a swoon, to bring them out of it to themselves again: I have done it with as harmless intentions as those of the angel mentioned in the

Acts,[1] when he struck Peter on the side, not to hurt him but to awake him,—lead him the way out of the prison he was bound in, and rescue him from imminent death. And if that will not satisfy some of the least judicious, or the most desperate, (for others I expect to find better affected, or more moderate,) I am willing to leave the intelligent and pious to judge between us; assuring those that are so much more jealous of their own honour than of God's, that as I write to reclaim them, not to deprive them of the repute of wits, or share it with them, so I shall not over much deplore the being by them denied a title to which I have as little pretension as right. And, to dispatch, I might add, that orators may not unjustly bear with some rudenesses in the style of a person that professes not rhetoric, and writes of a subject that needs few of her ornaments, and rejects many as indecencies misbecoming its majesty; and that severer divines may safely pardon some smoothness in a discourse written chiefly for gentlemen, who would scarce be fond of truth in every dress, by a gentleman who feared it might misbecome a person of his youth and quality studiously to decline a fashionable style. And if any divine should censure me for intruding upon his profession, and handling my subject less skilfully than he would have done, I will not urge that to write well on this subject is a task, which he that shall try will perhaps find

[1] Acts, xii. 7, &c.

far less easy than one would imagine; but I shall rather tell him, that I hope I may obtain his pardon, by assuring him that I shall be as little angry to be rectified in my mistakes, as to be shown the way when I am out of it, and as little troubled to have this discourse, that but skirmishes with laziness and profaneness, surpassed by another on the same subject, as to see another embracer of the same quarrel come in with a fresh regiment, to assist me against a formidable enemy in a conflict I were engaged in but with a troop, or bring cannon against a fortress I had but sakers to batter with. Yes, I shall be glad if my dim, short-lived match but serve to light another's brighter torch, and shall think it a happiness to have contributed, though but thus occasionally, towards the elucidation or splendour of the Scripture. And consonantly to this temper I would beseech any reader, that may so much want learning as to need such a request, not to measure what can be said in the defence and celebration of the Scripture's style, by what hath in the following discourse been traced by the callow pen of a travelling layman. For I profess ingenuously, that there can as little be an unwelcomer as an unjuster compliment placed upon me, than to mistake any thing that I am able to say, and much less what I have said, for the best that can be said upon such a subject. Nor is it my least encouragement to consent to the publication of such incomplete writings, that the considerations already intimated will probably keep my

readers from doing the Scripture and their own judgment so great an injury.

But I see I have so far transgressed the bounds of a letter, that if I add any thing more of apology, it must be for having been so prolix already. Wherefore there scarce remains any thing for me but to mind you, that since your persuasions have so much contributed to my exposing the following tract, incomplete as it is, your own credit is somewhat concerned in it as well as mine; and therefore I hope you will have a care that there be no faults of the printer added to those of the author, which do so little need additional blemishes. And especially that there pass no mistakes of the punctuation; for in such composures as this, if the stops be omitted or misplaced, it does not only lessen the gracefulness of what is said, but oftentimes quite spoil the sense. And if by this care of yours, which your affection, both for the subject and the writer, makes me confident of, and by the authority of your approbation, I find these imperfect considerations to be so favourably received as to deserve another edition, it will perhaps invite me to put them forth enlarged and recruited with what I may meet with pertinent to their subject, in such other papers of mine concerning the Scripture as I had not yet the conveniency to get into mine own hands and look over. However, though I pretend not here to answer all objections against the style of the Scripture, yet, as I hope, I have been so happy as to answer some of them, and

weaken most of the rest: so, if others that are more able will but employ themselves as earnestly in so useful a work, there is great hope that some answering this objection, another that, and a third another, they may at length be all of them satisfactorily replied to. And in the meantime I shall think my labours richly recompensed, if they either procure or establish a veneration for the Scripture in any of my readers, or do at least encourage those that are qualified for a far more prosperous making such an attempt, to undertake it, by showing those of them that know me what were easy for them to do, whilst they see what has been done even by me, whom sure they will not think to be half so much an orator, as I hope so uneasy a proof of his obedience will make you think him.

Sir,

Your affectionate friend,

And humble servant,

ROBERT BOYLE.

ON THE STYLE

OF THE

HOLY SCRIPTURES.

THESE things, dear Theophilus, being thus dispatched, I suppose we may now seasonably proceed to consider the style of the Scripture: a subject that will as well require as deserve some time and much attention; in regard that divers witty men, who freely acknowledge the authority of the Scripture, take exceptions at its style, and by those and their own reputation divert many from studying, or so much as perusing, those sacred writings; thereby at once giving men injurious and irreverent thoughts of it, and diverting them from allowing the Scripture the best way of justifying itself, and disabusing them; than which scarce any thing can be more prejudicial to a book that needs but to be sufficiently understood to be highly venerated: the writings these men criminate, and would keep others from reading, being like that honey which Saul's rash adjuration withheld the Israelites from eating, which being tasted, not only gratified the taste, but enlightened the eyes.[1]

[1] 1 Sam. xiv. 27, 29.

Now those allegations against the Scripture we are to examine being but too various, it will be requisite for us to consider the style of it, not in the stricter acceptation, wherein an author's style is wont to signify the choice and disposition of his words, but in that larger sense, wherein the word style comprehends not only the phraseology, the tropes and figures made use of by a writer, but his method, his lofty or humbler character, (as orators speak,) his pathetical or languid, his close or incoherent way of writing, and in a word, almost all the whole manner of an author's expressing himself.

Wherefore, though the title of an essay prefixed to this treatise will, I presume, invite you to expect from me rather some loose considerations than any full and methodical discourse concerning the style of the Scripture; yet I hope you will not think it strange if so comprehensive a theme make this part of the essay disproportionate to the others: especially since the nature of your commands and that of my design oblige me to interweave some other things with those that more directly regard the style of the Scripture, and particularly lay hold on all opportunities I can discreetly take, to invite you to study much and highly to esteem a book, which there is no danger you can too much study or esteem too highly.

It has been a common saying among the ancients, that even Jupiter could not please all. But by the objections I meet with against the Scripture, I find that the true God himself is not free from the imputation of his audacious creatures; who impiously presume to quarrel as well with his revelations as his providence, and express no more reverence to what he hath dictated than

to what he doth. For not now to mention what is by atheists and antiscripturists alleged to overthrow the truth and authority of the Scripture, (because it is not here, but elsewhere, that we are to deal with that sort of men,) even by some of those that acknowledge both (for with such only we have now to reason), there are I know not how many faults found with the style of the Scripture. For some of them are pleased to say that book is too obscure, others, that it is immethodical, others, that it is contradictory to itself, others, that the neighbouring parts of it are incoherent, others, that it is unadorned, others, that it is flat and unaffecting, others, that it abounds with things that are either trivial or impertinent, and also with useless repetitions. And indeed so many and so various are the faults and imperfections imputed by these men to the Scripture, that my wonder at them would be almost as great as is my trouble, if I did not also consider how much it is the interest of the great adversary of mankind, and especially of (that choicest part of it) the church, to depreciate composures that if duly reverenced would prove so destructive to his kingdom and designs; and if I did not also remember that (such is the querulous and exceptious nature of men) it was Cicero himself that observed, *Vitari non posse reprehensionem nisi nihil scribendo*; "It is not possible to escape censure but by not writing at all." But as poets and astronomers have fancied among the celestial lights that adorn the firmament, bears, bulls, goats, dogs, scorpions, and other beasts; so our adversaries impute I know not what imaginary deformities to a book ennobled by its author with many celestial

lights, fit to instruct the world, and discover to them the ways of truth and blessedness. Although I say this be so, yet since the misrepresentation made by these men of the Bible is not inferior to that made by poets and cosmographers of the firmament, I hope you will be as little deterred by the most disparaging imputations from studying the Scripture, as pilots are by the name of a bear given to the most northern constellation, from having their eyes upon the pole-star, and steering their courses by it.

And since you will easily believe that a person so averse from wrangling as I, is not like to make the disputing with these censurers of the Scripture-style any further his design, than as the invalidating their objections conduces to the reputation of that sacred book, I presume you will not think it at all impertinent if oftentimes I intermix with those things that more directly regard such objections, other things that seem to tend rather to celebrate than vindicate the Scripture; for in so doing, I hope I shall not alone considerably, though not perhaps so directly, strengthen my answers, by showing that we justly ascribe to the Scripture qualities quite opposite to the imperfections imputed to it; but I shall perfectly comply with my main design, which I here declare once for all, is but to engage you to study and value the Scripture, and therefore obliges me to answer objections only so far forth as they may look like arguments to dissuade you from prizing and studying it. And because I find not that the objections to be considered have any great coherence with, or dependence on each other, I shall not scruple to mention them, and my

reflections on them, in no other order than that wherein they shall chance to occur to my thoughts whilst I am writing.

Of the considerations, then, that I am to lay before you, there are three or four which are of a more general nature, and therefore being such as may each of them be pertinently employed against several of the exceptions taken at the Scripture's style, it will not be inconvenient to mention them before the rest.

And in the first place, it should be considered, that those cavillers at the style of the Scripture that you and I have hitherto met with, do (for want of skill in the original) especially in the Hebrew, judge of it by the translations wherein alone they read it. Now scarce any but a linguist will imagine how much a book may lose of its elegancy, by being read in another tongue than that it was written in, especially if the languages from which and into which the version is made, be so very differing, as are those of the eastern and these western parts of the world. But of this I foresee an occasion of saying something hereafter; yet at present I must observe to you, that the style of the Scripture is much more disadvantaged than that of other books, by being judged of by translations: for the religious and just veneration that the interpreters of the Bible have had for that sacred book, has made them in most places render the Hebrew and Greek passages so scrupulously word for word, that for fear of not keeping close enough to the sense, they usually care not how much they lose of the eloquence of the passages they translate. So that whereas in those versions of other books that are made by good linguists, the

interpreters are wont to take the liberty to recede from the author's words, and also substitute other phrases instead of his, that they may express his meaning without injuring his reputation; in translating the Old Testament interpreters have not put Hebrew phrases into Latin or English phrases, but only into Latin or English words, and have too often besides, by not sufficiently understanding, or at least considering, the various significations of words, particles and tenses, in the holy tongue, made many things appear less coherent, or less rational, or less considerable, which by a more free and skilful rendering of the original, would not be blemished by any appearance of such imperfection. And though this fault of interpreters be pardonable enough in them, as carrying much of its excuse in its cause, yet it cannot but much derogate from the Scripture to appear with peculiar disadvantages, besides those many that are common to almost all books by being translated.

For whereas the figures of rhetoric are wont by orators to be reduced to two comprehensive sorts, and one of those does so depend upon the sound and placing of the words (whence the Greek rhetoricians call such figures σχήματα λέξεως) that if they be altered, though the sense be retained, the figure may vanish; this sort of figures, I say, which comprises those that orators call *epanados*, *antanaclasis*, and a multitude of others, are wont to be lost in such literal translations as are ours of the Bible, as I could easily show by many instances, if I thought it requisite.

Besides, there are in Hebrew, as in other languages, certain appropriated graces and a peculiar emphasis belonging to some expressions, which

must necessarily be impaired by any translation, and are but too often quite lost in those that adhere too scrupulously to the words of the original. And as in a lovely face, though a painter may well enough express the cheeks, and the nose, and lips, yet there is often something of splendour and vivacity in the eyes which no pencil can reach to equal: so in some choice composures, though a skilful interpreter may happily enough render into his own language a great part of what he translates, yet there may well be some shining passages, some sparkling and emphatical expressions that he cannot possibly represent to the life. And this consideration is more applicable to the Bible and its translations, than to other books, for two particular reasons.

For first, it is more difficult to translate the Hebrew of the Old Testament, than if that book were written in Syriac or Arabic, or some such other eastern language. Not that the holy tongue is much more difficult to be learned than others, but because in the other learned tongues we know there are commonly variety of books extant, whereby we may learn the various significations of words and phrases; whereas the pure Hebrew being unhappily lost, except so much of it as remains in the Old Testament, out of whose books alone we can but very imperfectly frame a dictionary and a language, there are many words, especially the Ἅπαξ λεγόμενα, "those which occur but once," and those that occur but seldom, of which we know but that one signification, or those few acceptations wherein we find it used in those texts that we think we clearly understand: whereas if we consider the nature of the primitive tongue, whose words being

not numerous, are most of them equivocal enough, and do many of them abound with strangely-different meanings; and if we consider too how likely it is that the numerous conquests of David, and the wisdom, prosperity, fleets, and various commerces of his son Solomon did both enrich and spread the Hebrew language, it cannot but seem very probable, that the same word or phrase may have had divers other significations than interpreters have taken notice of, or we are now aware of, since we find in the Chaldee, Syriac, Arabic, and other eastern tongues, that the Hebrew words and phrases (a little varied, according to the nature of those dialects) have other, and oftentimes very differing significations besides those that the modern interpreters of the Bible have ascribed to them. I say the modern, because the ancient versions before, or not long after our Saviour's time, and especially that which we vulgarly call the Septuagint, do frequently favour our conjecture, by rendering Hebrew words and phrases to senses very distant from those more received significations in our texts, when there appears no other so probable reason of their so rendering them, as their believing them capable of significations differing enough from those to which our later interpreters have thought fit to confine themselves. The use that I would make of this consideration may easily be conjectured, namely, that it is probable that many of those texts whose expressions, as they are rendered in our translations, seem flat, or improper, or incoherent with the context, would appear much otherwise, if we were acquainted with all the significations of words and phrases that were known in the times when the Hebrew language flourished, and

the sacred books were written: it being very likely, that among those various significations some one or other would afford a better sense and a more significant and sinewy expression than we meet with in our translations, and perhaps would make such passages as seem flat or uncouth, appear eloquent and emphatical. Whilst I am writing this, our English tongue presents to my thoughts an example which may seem to illustrate much of the foregoing consideration; and it is this: that though, as one would easily believe, there are but a few forms of speaking which relate to the birth of infants, yet there are five or six expressions concerning that one affair, wherein very peculiar and unwonted notions belong to the words and phrases. For if I say that such a woman has looked every hour these ten days—that yesterday she cried out—that she had a quick and easy labour—that last night she was brought a bed—that now she lies in—and that it is fit we should remember the lady in the straw; if, I say, I make use of any or all of these expressions, an Englishman would readily understand me; but if I should literally and word for word translate them, I say not into Greek or Hebrew, but into the languages of our neighbour nations, French or Italian, men would not understand what I mean: and if a discourse wherein they were employed were translated by an interpreter only acquainted with the genuine and more obvious signification of the English word, it would in such passages appear very disadvantageously, and perhaps be thought impertinent or nonsensical to a French or Italian reader.

But this is not all; for I consider, in the second

place, that not only we have lost diverse of the significations of many of the Hebrew words and phrases, but that we have also lost the means of acquainting ourselves with a multitude of particulars relating to the topography, history, rites, opinions, factions, customs, &c. of the ancient Jews and neighbouring nations, without the knowledge of which we cannot, in the perusing of books of such antiquity as those of the Old Testament, and written by and principally for Jews, we cannot, I say, but lose very much of that esteem, delight, and relish with which we should read very many passages, if we discerned the references and allusions that are made in them to those stories, proverbs, opinions, &c. to which such passages may well be supposed to relate. And this conjecture will not I presume appear irrational, if you but consider how many of the handsomest passages in Juvenal, Persius, Martial, and divers other Latin writers (not to mention Hesiod, Musæus, or other more ancient Greeks) are lost to such readers as are unacquainted with the Roman customs, government, and stories; nay, or are not sufficiently informed of a great many particular circumstances relating to the condition of those times, and of divers particular persons pointed at in those poems; and therefore it is that the latter critics have been fain to write comments, or at least notes upon every page, and in some pages upon almost every line of those books, to enable the reader to discern the eloquence and relish the wit of the author. And if such dilucidations be necessary to make us value writings that treat of familiar and secular affairs, and were written in an European language, and in times

and countries much nearer to ours, how much do you think we must lose of the elegancy of the Book of Job, the Psalms of David, the Song of Solomon, and other sacred composures, which not only treat oftentimes of sublime and supernatural mysteries, but were written in very remote regions so many ages ago, amidst circumstances to most of which we cannot but be great strangers? And thus much for my first general consideration.

My second is this, that we should carefully distinguish betwixt what the Scripture itself says, and what is only said in the Scripture. For we must not look upon the Bible as an oration of God to men, or as a body of laws, like our English statute-book, wherein it is the legislator that all the way speaks to the people, but as a collection of composures of very differing sorts, and written at very distant times; and of such composures, that though the holy men of God (as St. Peter calls them) were acted by the Holy Spirit, who both excited and assisted them in penning the Scripture, yet there are many others besides the author and the penmen introduced speaking there. For besides the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, the four Evangelists, the Acts of the Apostles, and other parts of Scripture, that are evidently historical, and wont to be so called, there are in the other books many passages that deserve the same name, and many others wherein, though they be not mere narratives of things done, many sayings and expressions are recorded that either belong not to the Author of the Scripture, or must be looked upon as such wherein his secretaries personate others. So that in a considerable part of the Scripture, not only prophets and kings and

priests being introduced speaking; but soldiers, shepherds, and women, and such other sorts of persons from whom witty or eloquent things are not (especially when they speak extempore) to be expected, it would be very injurious to impute to the Scripture any want of eloquence that may be noted in the expressions of others than its Author. For though not only in romances, but in many of those that pass for true histories, the supposed speakers may be observed to talk as well as the historian; yet that is but either because the men so introduced were ambassadors, orators, generals, or other eminent men for parts as well as employments, or because the historian does, as it often happens, give himself the liberty to make speeches for them, and does not set down what indeed they said, but what he thought fit that such persons on such occasions should have said; whereas the penmen of the Scripture, as one of them truly professes, having not followed cunningly-devised fables in what they have written, have faithfully set down the sayings as well as actions they record, without making them rather congruous to the conditions of the speakers than to the laws of truth.

Nor is it only the style of very many passages of Scripture that may be justified by our second consideration, but with the same distinction well applied, we may silence some of their malicious cavils, who accuse the Scripture of teaching vice by the ungodly sayings and examples that are here and there to be met with in it. But as the apostle said, that 'they are not all Israel that are of Israel;'[1] so may we say, that all is not Scripture

[1] Rom. ix. 6.

that is in the Scripture: for many wicked persons and their perveter, Satan, are there introduced, whose sayings the Holy Ghost does not adopt, but barely registers; nor does the Scripture affirm that what they said was true, but that it is true they said it. And if I had not reduced some of these cavillers to confess that they never did themselves read those pieces of the Bible at some of whose passages they cavil, I should much more admire than I do to find them father, as confidently as they do, all they hear cited from it upon the enditer of it; as if the devil's speeches were not recorded there, and as if it were requisite to make a history divinely inspired, that all the blasphemies and crimes it registers should be so too. As for the ills recorded in the Scripture, besides that wicked persons were necessary to exercise God's children, and illustrate his providence; and besides the allegations commonly made on that subject, we may consider that there being many things to be declined as well as practised, it was fit we should be taught as well what to avoid as what to imitate; and the known rocks and shelves do as well guide the seamen as the pole-star. Now, as we could not be armed against the tempter's methods, if we ignored them; so could we never safelier nor better learn them than in his book, who can alone discover the wiles, and fathom the 'depths of Satan,'[1] and track him through all his windings and otherwise untraceable labyrinths, and in that book where the antidote is exhibited with the poison, and either men's defeat or victory may teach us at

[1] Rev. ii. 24.

others' costs, and without our hazard, the true art of that warfare we are all so highly concerned in. And as chemists observe in the book of nature, that those simples that wear the figure or resemblance (by them termed signature) of a distempered part, are medicinal for that infirmity of that part whose signature they bear; so in God's other book, the vicious persons there mentioned still prove, under some notion or upon some score or other, antidotal against the vices notorious in them; being, to present it you also in a Scripture simile, like the brazen serpent in the wilderness, set up to cure the poison infused by those they resemble. 'Whatsoever things were written aforetimes,' says the apostle, 'were written for our instruction.'[1] And to make further use of our former comparison, those to whom the Scripture gives the names of lions, wolves, foxes, and other brutes, by God's assistance, prove to his saints as instructive beasts as doth the northern bear unto the wandering pilot; and as anciently, God fed his servant Elias sometimes by an angel, sometimes by a woman, and sometimes too by ravens; so doth he make all persons in the Bible, whether good or bad or indifferent, supply his servants with that instruction which is the aliment of virtue and of souls, and makes them and their examples contribute to the verification of that passage of St. Paul, wherein he says that 'all things co-operate for good to them that love God.'[2]

My third consideration is this, that the several books of the Bible were written chiefly and primarily to those to whom they were first addressed,

[1] Rom. xv. 4. [2] Ib. viii. 28.

and to their contemporaries, and that yet the Bible, not being written for one age or people only, but for the whole people of God, consisting of persons of all ages, nations, sexes, complexions, and conditions, it was fit it should be written in such a way as that none of all these might be quite excluded from the advantages designed them in it. Therefore were these sacred books so wisely as well as graciously tempered, that their variety so comprehends the several abilities and dispositions of men, that, as some pictures seem to have their eyes directly fixed on every one that looks on them from what part soever of the room he eyes them, there is scarce any frame of spirit a man can be of, or any condition he can be in, to which some passage of Scripture is not as patly applicable as if it were meant for him, or said to him, as Nathan once did to David, 'Thou art the man.'[1] What has been thus observed touching God's design in the contrivance of the Scripture, may assist us to defend the style of a great multitude of its texts, and particularly of divers of those which belong to the five following kinds.

And first, the several books that make up the canon the Scripture, being primarily designed for their use that lived in the times wherein they were divulged, it need be no wonder if each of them contain many things that principally concern the persons that then lived, and be accordingly written in such a way, that many of its passages allude and otherwise relate to particular times, places, persons, customs, opinions, stories, &c. which, by

[1] 2 Sam. xii. 7.

our formerly-mentioned want of a good account of such remote ages and regions, cannot afford us that instruction and satisfaction that those to whom such books were immediately addressed might easily derive from the perusal of them.

Next, as some portions of Scripture were principally designed for ages very long since past, so some other parts of it, especially those that are yet prophetic, may probably respect future times much more than ours; and our posterity may admire what we cannot now relish, because we do not yet understand it. Moreover, there being many portions of Scripture, as almost the whole four last books of Moses, wherein God is introduced as either immediately or mediately giving laws to his people or his worshippers, I suppose it will not be thought necessary that such parts of Scripture should be eloquently written, and that the supreme Legislator of the world, who reckons the greatest kings amongst his subjects, should in giving laws tie himself to those of rhetoric, the scrupulous observation of which would much derogate from those two qualities so considerable in laws, clearness and majesty.

Besides, there being a sort of men, of which I hope the number will daily increase, who have such a desire as St. Peter tells us the angels themselves cherish, to look into the mysteries of religion,[1] and are qualified with elevated and comprehensive intellects to apprehend them in some measure, it is not unfit that to exercise such men's abilities, and to reward their industry, there should be some ab-

[1] 1 Pet. i. 12.

struse texts of Scripture fitted to the capacities of such speculative wits, and above the reach of vulgar apprehensions.

And on the other side, the omniscient Author of the Scripture, foreseeing that it would follow, from the condition of mankind, that the greatest part of the members of the church would be no great clerks, and many of them very weak or illiterate, it was but suitable to his goodness that a great many other passages of the books designed for them as well as others, should be written in such a plain and familiar way as may befit such readers, and let them see that they were not forgotten or overlooked by him who says, by the prophet, that all souls are his.[1] And yet in many even of these texts which seem chiefly to have been designed to teach the simple, scholars themselves may find much to learn. For not only there are some passages that contain milk for babes, and others that exhibit strong meat for riper stomachs, but oftentimes (as cows afford both milk and beef) the same texts that babes may suck milk from, strong men may find strong meat in. The Scripture itself, in some sense fulfilling the promise made us in it, that *habenti dabitur* 'to him that hath shall be given,' and being like a fire that serves most men but to warm and dry themselves, and dress their meat, but serves the skilful chemist to draw quintessences and make extracts.

I doubt not but you are acquainted as well as I with divers querulous readers, who very boldly find fault with this variety wherein God hath thought fit to exhibit his truth and declare his will

[1] Ezek. xviii. 4.

in Holy Writ, and presume to censure some texts as too mysterious, very many as too plain. But these exceptions at the economy of the Scripture do commonly proceed from their pride that make them; for that vice inclining them to fancy that the Bible either was or ought to have been written purposely for them, prompts them to make exceptions suitable to such a presumption; and whilst they look upon their own abilities as the measure of all discourses, to call all that transcends their apprehensions dark, and all that equals it not, trivial. They will be always finding fault with the Holy Ghost's expressions, both where his condescensions make them clear, and where the sublimity of the matter leaves them obscure; like bats, whose tender eyes love neither day nor night, and are only pleased with (what is alone proportioned to their weak sight) a twilight, that is both or neither. But as a skilful fowler, (and the comparison will be excused by those that remember that God, in Scripture, is said to be pressed 'as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves,'[1] and the Son of man to be as 'a thief in the night,') according to the differing natures of his game, so contrives and appropriates his stratagems, that some he catches with light, as larks with day-nets; some with baits, as pigeons with peas; some with frights, as blackbirds with a sparrow-hawk or a low-bell; and some he draws in with company, as ducks and such like sociable birds with decoy-fowl: so God, knowing that some persons must be wrought upon by reason, others allured by interest; some driven in by terror, and others

[1] Amos, xi. 13.

again brought in by imitation, hath, by a rare and merciful, if I may so call it, suppleness of wisdom, so varied the heavenly doctrine into ratiocinations, mysteries, promises, threats, and examples, that there is not any sort of people that in the Scripture may not find religion represented in that form they are most disposed to receive impressions from; God therein graciously dealing with his children not unlike the prophet that shrunk himself into the proportion of the child he meant to revive.[1] The geniuses, the capacities, and the dispositions of men, are so distinct, and oftentimes so extravagant, that there is scarce a passage of Scripture that is not suitable or appropriate to some of those numberless differences of humour the Bible was designed for, and in that unimaginable variety of occurrences shared amongst such vast multitudes finds not a proper object. And therefore God who, having created them, best knows the frame of men's spirits, having been pleased to match them with proper texts, I shall not quarrel with his vouchsafing to lisp mysteries to those that would be deterred by any other way of expressing them, and to qualify his instruments according to the natures he designs them to work upon, lest he should say to me, with the householder in the gospel, 'Is thine eye evil, because I am good?' And sure it must extremely misbecome us to repine at the greatness of God's condescensions, only upon the score of a knowledge or attainments that we owe to it.

By reflecting upon the three foregoing general

[1] 2 Kings, iv. 34.

considerations, you will, I presume, easily perceive what it is that is pretended to in what I represent to you in the behalf of the style of the Scripture. For you will easily guess by what I have hitherto told you, I pretend not to prove or assert that every text of Scripture, especially in translations, is embellished with the ornaments of rhetoric, but only to show these two things:—the one, that as there may be drawn from divers things in the Scripture itself (without excluding the style) considerable arguments of its having been written or approved by men peculiarly assisted by the Spirit of God; so, if a man be persuaded either by these intrinsic arguments (which I may in another paper evince to be no slight ones) or by any others, of the heavenly origination of the Scripture, if, I say, a man be persuaded of this, he ought not in reason by the style of these books to be kept from diligently studying of them, and highly valuing them; the other (which I add as one evincement of the former) is, that not only the Scripture is every where written with as much eloquence as the chief author (whose omniscience qualified him to judge best in the case) thought fit and expedient for his wise ends in publishing it, but that, as we now have the sacred books, especially in their originals, very many passages of them are so far from being destitute of what even our western nations count eloquence, that they deserve to be admired for it. And, Theophilus, if you please to keep in your eye what I have now told you concerning my scope in writing, and to bear in your memory the three general considerations I have premised, I shall need hereafter, as often as I have occasion to men-

tion them, only to point at them, and thereby shall excuse you and myself from the unwelcome trouble of many times repeating the same things.

To proceed then to the more particular objections against the Scripture. The first I shall consider is, that it is obscure. And this I find alleged by two sorts of men to two differing purposes; some endeavouring by it to disgrace the Bible, and others only making the pretended darkness of many of its passages an excuse for their not studying it.

To the first sort of objectors I answer, that it is little less than inevitable that many passages of the Scripture should seem obscure to us, and that it is but fit that divers others should be so too.

For first, the objectors, as I formerly observed, reading the Bible but in translations, are destitute of those helps to understand the sense of many passages that may be afforded by skill in the original languages. Besides, that even to those that have taken pains to understand the original tongues, the genuine sense of divers words and phrases is denied by the injury of time, through which (as was already noted) a greater part of the Hebrew and Chaldean tongues have been lost.

Secondly, many texts appear obscure to those that live in these latter times, only because that by reason of the perishing of those writings and other monuments of antiquity that were contemporary to the books of the Old Testament, we cannot be sufficiently acquainted with the history, the laws and customs of the Jews and other nations mentioned in the Scripture, so that it need be no wonder if divers passages of the Books of Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, the Kings, Esther, and

other historical books of the Scripture, as also of the four last books of Moses, are obscure to us, and yet might be very intelligible to those in whose times they were written, and for whose use they were principally designed. As although Lucius Florus would in many places appear very obscure to such readers as know nothing of the Roman affairs but by the account given of them in his writings (whence divers late critics have been invited to illustrate him out of other Latin authors,) yet questionless to the Roman readers that lived in his time, or not very long after, his book was easy enough to be understood. How much the want of other historians contemporary to the penmen of the Old Testament may make things seem obscure that might by such stories be easily cleared up, we may observe from divers passages of the New Testament, which can scarce be well-understood without an account of Herod's family, and the changes that happened about our Saviour's time in Judea, which was sometimes all of it governed by Herod the Great that massacred the children at Bethlehem, and sometimes was governed by Pilate and other Roman magistrates, and sometimes was so divided that it was as to some parts only governed by Herod's descendants under various titles; the want of the knowledge of which, and of the several princes that bore the name of Herod, does much puzzle many readers that are strangers to Josephus. And it seems somewhat strange to many, that Christ should in St. Luke admonish his hearers to fly out of Jerusalem and Judea, and not resort thither from the neighbouring countries, 'when they should see Jerusalem en-

compassed with armies,'[1] since those armies would probably hinder the counselled retirement, at least as to the city. Whereas he that finds in the story, that the Roman forces under Gratus did on a sudden, and, as good authors tell us, without any manifest cause withdraw from the siege of Jerusalem, and then return to it again, and, under Titus, carry the town by force; he that shall read also in Euseb. lib. iii. cap. 5, that the Christians of Jerusalem did (divinely admonished) make use of the opportunity presented them to quit all of them the city and retire to Pella on the other side of Jordan; he, I say, that shall read and take notice of all this, will not only clearly understand the reasonableness of our Saviour's warning, but admire the prophetic spirit by which he could give it. And as it is difficult to collect out of the Old Testament alone the history of those times wherein it was written; so it is not to be expected, that out of those books we should be able to collect and comprehend either complete ideas of the Israelitish government, civil and ecclesiastical, or the true state of their several sects, opinions and affairs in matters of religion: and yet without the knowledge of those it cannot be but that many texts will seem obscure to us, which were not at all so to them that were *coætaneous* to the penmen of those books. The labours of some modern critics that have put themselves to the trouble of making a thorough search into the writings of those Jewish rabbies that lived about our Saviour's and his apostles' times, have by the help of this rabinical learning already cleared up divers texts which

[1] Luke, xxi. 21, 22.

before were dark, because they related to particular sects, customs, sayings or opinions amongst the then Jews, whose knowledge the writers of the New Testament do not teach but suppose. And I doubt not but higher and valuable attainments in that kind of learning (how worthless soever I should think it, if it were not conducive to the illustration of the Scripture) will, ere it be very long, disperse that obscurity which yet dwells upon divers other texts, and will show the groundlessness of all our cavils at them, as well as that of many of our too fierce contentions about them. I shall add, that I dare almost presume to question, whether even our famousest critics have not left divers Mosaical texts in the dark, if not clouded them by their comments, merely for want of knowing the religion of the ancient Zabians, in opposition of whose magical worship and superstitions, I am apt to think divers ceremonies of the ritual law of the Jews to have been instituted. And yet of those Zabiists (or צבאים, *tzabeem*, as the Hebrews and Arabians express the name) I find a deep and general silence in classic authors, except (the rabbi's oracle(Maimonides; out of whom our great antiquary, Mr. Selden, both in familiar discourse and in his excellent tract of the Syrian Deities, gave me first a hint, which by lighting on another author of those parts I have since had the luck to improve sufficiently to make me fear, that they that are strangers to the Zabians' rites and creed, will scarce give us the clearest account the theme is capable of in divers passages of the Mosaic law: as I am apt to think that our ignorance or want of taking notice of the persuasions and practices of the Gnostics, Carpocratians, and

the sects allied to theirs, if it do not make us mistake and misinterpret, doth at least keep us from giving the clearest interpretations whereof they are capable to many passages of the New Testament, wherein they are either clearly pointed at, or closely related to.

Thirdly, we may reasonably suppose, that of the texts that are now difficult unto us, there are divers that are so but because they were principally intended for the use of those that shall live in aftertimes, by whom they will questionless be better understood. To the Jews that lived in and long after Moses's time, many of those predictions, both verbal and typical, of the Messias, seemed very dark, which to us Christians are abundantly illustrated by the rising of that Sun of righteousness, who was aimed at in them. And though the mysterious temple and city described in Ezekiel, as also much of the Apocalypse and divers other prophetic passages of holy writ do yet seem abstruse to us, yet they will not appear so to those to whom their completion (the best expositor of dark prophecies) shall have unfolded them. For I observe, that as some divine predictions are clearly expressed, to the intent, that those that are made acquainted with them may beforehand know what will happen; so others are proposed, not so much that those to whom they are first addressed should know the foretold events before they come to pass, as that, when they do come to pass, the same accomplishment that expounds them may evince that the foreteller of them was able to foresee them: according to that of our Saviour to his disciples, to whom he prophesied the sufferings they should undergo: 'These things have I told you, that when

the time shall come ye may remember that I told you of them.'[1]

Fourthly, it was fit that there should be some obscure passages left in the inspired volume, to keep those from the knowledge of some of those divine mysteries, that are both delightful and useful, though not absolutely necessary, who do not think such knowledge worth studying for. As it was also fit (which I partly noted above) that there should be some clouded and mysterious texts to excite and recompense the industry and speculation of elevated wits and religious inquirers.

Lastly, there are divers obscure passages in Scripture, wherein the difficulty lies in the thing itself that is expressed, not in the Scripture's manner of expressing it. For not to mention that obscureness that is wont to attend prophetic raptures, (of which there are many mentioned in Scripture,) there are divers things that we agree to be knowable by the bare light of nature, without revelation, which yet are so uneasy to be satisfactorily understood by our imperfect intellects, that let them be delivered in the clearest expressions men can devise, the notions themselves will yet appear obscure. Thus in natural philosophy itself, the nature of place and time, the origin of motion, and the manner whereby the human soul performs her functions, are things which no writers delivered so clearly, as not to leave the things somewhat obscure to inquisitive and examining readers. And shall we then wonder, that those texts of Scripture that treat of the nature and decrees of God, and of such sublime mysteries as the trinity, the incarna-

[1] John, xxvi. 4.

tion, the influence of the Spirit upon the soul of man, and such other abstruse things, which it cannot be reasonably expected that human words should keep from being hard to be comprehended by human understandings, should be obscure to us, especially if we suffer our not understanding their full meaning at first to deter us from endeavouring to find it out by further study? I am sorry I can add on this occasion, that divers texts are made to appear more dark than otherwise they would, by the glosses and interpretations of some that pretend to expound them. For there are divers subtle men, who being persuaded upon certain metaphysical notions they are fond of, or by the authority of such either churches or persons as they highly reverence, that such or such niceties are either requisite to the explication of this or that doctrine delivered in Scripture, or at least deducible from it, will make bold so to interpret dark texts (and sometimes even clear ones) that they shall seem to hold forth not only their own sense, but the nice speculations or deductions of him that quotes them: so that divers texts, which to a rational and unprepossessed peruser would appear plain enough, seem to contain inextricable difficulties to those unwary or prejudicate readers, who are not careful to distinguish betwixt the plain sense of a text itself, and those metaphysical subtleties which witty and interested persons would father upon it, though oftentimes those niceties are either so groundless, that though there needs much wit to devise them, there needs but a little reason to despise them; or so unintelligible as to tempt a considering man to suspect that the proposers either mean not what they speak, or understand not what they say. And I could wish these

metaphysical quirks, with which several, not only schoolmen but other writers, have perplexed the doctrine of predestination, of the Trinity, of the operation of the Spirit of God upon the will of man, and some other mysteries of Christian religion, did not give advantages against those doctrines to the opposers of them, and perhaps make some men opposers who otherwise would not have been so. And I fear that too great an opportunity has been afforded to atheistical wits by the unintelligible fancies which many have made bold to add to what the Scripture has revealed concerning the eternity and infiniteness of God; for whilst men indiscreetly and unskilfully twist together as integral parts of the same doctrine a revealed truth, with their own metaphysical speculations about it, though these be too often such as cannot be proved, or perhaps be so much as understood, they tempt such examining readers as are rational enough to discern the groundlessness of one part of the doctrine, to reject the whole for its sake. But I fear I have digressed: for my intention was only to intimate, that it is not oftentimes so much what the Scripture says, as what some men persuade others it says, that makes it seem obscure; and that as to some other passages that are so indeed, since it is the abstruseness of what is taught in them that makes them almost inevitably so; it is little less saucy upon such a score to find fault with the style of the Scripture, than to do so with the Author for making us but men.

Thus much being said by way of answer to the first sort of objectors of darkness against the Scripture, it is easy to foresee that the second sort of them may endeavour to pervert what has been

delivered, to apologise for their neglect of the Scripture, by alleging, that albeit what has been represented may serve to show that the obscurity of the Scripture is justifiable, yet the very proving it needful or fit that it should be obscure, is a plain confession that it is so. Wherefore it is requisite that I now say something to this sort of objectors also, who are so unfavourable to the Scripture and themselves, as that, because they cannot understand all of it, they will not endeavour to learn any thing from it. I have already acknowledged it, and shall not now deny that (as heaven itself is not all stars) there may be parts of Scripture whose clear expositions shall ennoble and bless the remotest of succeeding ages, and that perhaps some mysteries are so obscure, that they are reserved to the illumination and blaze of the last and universal fire.

But here it would be considered in the first place, that those texts that are so difficult to be understood, are not necessary to be so. In points fundamental and indispensably necessary, the darkness of Scripture is no less partial than of Egypt, which benighted only the enemies, but involved not the people of God: in such articles as these, 'If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds;'[1] at least, in relation to such truths as these, we may justly apply that of Moses, where he tells Israel, 'This commandment which I command thee this day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.'——'But the word is very near unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.'[2] And surely the Bible's appro-

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 4. [2] Deut. xxx. 11, 12, 13, 14.

priate office being, as itself tells us, 'to enlighten the eyes, and make wise the simple;'[1] and it being written for the use of the whole people of God, whereof the greater number are no clerks, things are there expressed with an evidence proportionable to the degree of assent that they exact, and are as far forth intelligible to pious and industrious readers as they are necessary to be understood by them; and we may not unfitly say of the understanding of those cloudy passages of Scripture, what I remember a father said of the sacrament, *Non privatio sed contemptus damnat*, "That not the wanting it, but the slighting it shall condemn men." It is our duty to study them, but it is not, always, to understand them.

And as the knowledge of those texts that are obscure is not necessary, so those others whose sense is necessary to be understood are easy enough to be so; and those are as much more numerous than the others, as more clear. Yes, there are shining passages enough in Scripture to light us the way to heaven, though some unobvious stars of that bright sphere cannot be discerned without the help of a telescope. Since God then has been pleased to provide sufficiently for our instruction, what reason have we to repine, if we have in a book, not designed for us alone, things provided also for those who are fitted for higher attainments; especially since, if we be not wanting to ourselves, those passages that are so obscure as to teach us nothing else, may at least teach us humility?

Nor does it misbecome God's goodness any more than his wisdom, to have so tempered the canonical

[1] Psalm xix. 7, 8.

books, as therein to leave all sorts of readers an exercise for their industry, and give even the greatest doctors continual inducements to implore his instructions, and depend on him for his irradiations, by leaving amongst many passages that stoop unto our weakness, some that may make us sensible of it. It should, methinks, be looked upon as the prerogative, not the disparagement of the Scriptures, that the revelation of his truth vouchsafed us by God in them is like a river, wherein a lamb may quench his thirst, and which an elephant cannot exhaust. I should think him but an ill-natured child who should be angry to see strong meat provided for his elder brothers, because he himself can yet digest nothing but milk; and as the same child, being grown up to riper years, would be then troubled, that according to his first envious wish there were no stronger aliment provided in the family than milk; so, when by the attentive and repeated perusal of the Scripture, a child in knowledge shall attain to some higher measure of skill in the Scriptures, he will then be well pleased to have his understanding exercised by those most mysterious texts, of which he formerly complained that they surpassed it. However, since there are so many plain passages of Scripture that clearly hold forth, not only all that is necessary for us to know, but I fear much more than we are careful to learn and practise, the zealous Christian would no more decline feeding on this heavenly food, though all the hard places should still remain such to him, than the Jews would forbear to eat the paschal lamb, 'though not a bone of it were to be broken.'[1] And, in earnest,

[1] Exod. xii. 46.

would not he merit unrelieved beggary, that should refuse the profit of a rich mine, because all those of the world are not yet discovered, nor those of the Indies exhausted?

Moreover, the pretended obscureness of the Bible is a mistaken discouragement from reading it; for the frequency of reading it still lessens that obscurity, which, like a mist, seems thicker at a distance than when one enters it, and attempts a passage through it, which in our case many pious students have done so prosperously, as to find, by welcome experience, that what at a distance deterred them, was not intended to frustrate industry, but punish laziness.

Besides that the Scripture being avowedly the best expositor of itself, our ignorance of those places whose sense we seek for, makes us often occasionally much knowinger, and more perfect in the meaning of all the rest; and makes us too so much more ready in the uses of them, that I cannot but apply to this subject the fable of that dying husbandman, who, by telling his sons of a hidden mass of wealth he had buried in a nameless place of his vineyard, occasioned their so sedulous delving all the ground, and turning up the earth about the roots of the vines, that they found indeed a treasure, though not in gold, in wine: for thus out of hope, by the light of understood Scriptures to penetrate the sense of the obscurer ones, we occasionally so improve our knowledge and readiness in the clearer passages, that our by-acquists do richly recompense our frustrated, or rather unsucceeding, pains; since our particular disappointments hinder not the promotion of our general design, which is a greater proficiency in spiritual knowledge, and therefore ought not to deter us from the duty of

those searches, in which not only to discover is happy, but even the unsuccceeding attempts are gainful, whatever the event be; the pains being seldom fruitless, but reaching either their end or recompence. And this prompts me to represent to you further, that not only the Scripture is instructive upon the same account with other theological writings, but that we may hope to improve our understandings by it upon this score, that it is also the instituted means, as well of knowledge as of grace, and appointed for our instruction by him who, as sin came into the world by man's listening to the words of the devil, is pleased to make restoring grace operate chiefly by our listening to the word of God, whether heard or read. Wherefore those whom the intuition of this encouragement invites to be diligent perusers of the Scripture, do to their infirm understandings, as the inhabitants of Gennesareth did to their sick and weak countrymen, lay them in Jesus's way, and consequently in that of recovery.[1] It is of, at least one of the darkest books of the Scripture, that it is said, 'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy.'[2] The eunuch, in the Acts, would, though upon the highway, needs read the prophet Isaiah; and though, as appears by his question to Philip, as then he understood not what he read, yet did the Spirit take thence (perhaps a rise as well as) opportunity to reveal Christ unto him, and both satisfy him of the meaning of that prediction, and acquaint him with the fresh and happy accomplishment of it. And surely this consideration of the Bible's being

[1] Mark, vi. 56. [2] Rev. i. 3.

one of the conduit-pipes through which God hath appointed to convey his truth as well as graces to his children, should methinks both hugely animate us to the searching of the Scriptures, and equally refresh us in it; for, as no instrument is weak in an omnipotent hand, so ought no means to be looked upon as more promising than that which is like to be prospered by grace, as it is devised by Omniscience. We may confidently expect God's blessing upon his own institutions, since we know, 'that whatsoever we ask according to the will of God, he will give it us;'[1] and we can scarce ask any thing more agreeable to the will of God, than the competent understanding of that book wherein his will is contained.

The difficulty ought not to deter us from the duty of searching the Scriptures, the difficultest commands of God being a warrant to a believer's confidence of being enabled acceptably, though not exactly, to obey them; which St. Peter seems to have known well in the theory, though he failed in the practice, when to be enabled to walk upon the sea, he desires only that our Saviour would please to command him to come to him upon the water.[2] The Bible is, indeed, amongst books what the diamond is amongst stones, the preciousest, and the sparklingest, the most apt to scatter light, and yet the solidest, and the most proper to make impressions; but were it as unsuitable to its end as it is the contrary, I should remember, that our Saviour could successively employ even clay and spittle to illuminate blind eyes:[3] and though I thought the Bible to be on other accounts no more

[1] 1 John, v. 14. [2] Matt. xi. 28. [3] John, ix. 6.

than equal to other books of morality and devotion, God's designation would make me study it more hopefully, by minding me of that of the Syrian leper, when he would needs have Abana and Parphar, rivers of Damascus, likely to be as medicinal for his disease as Jordan, and vainly fancied that God's appointment could not put a difference betwixt things that knew no other.[1]

I know, that because of the intermixture of some obscurer texts of Scripture with the clear ones, there are divers well-meaning, and even devout persons that leave the study of it for that of other books of religion, which, by leaving out all such difficulter matters seem to promise more of instruction: but notwithstanding this, I shall not much scruple to affirm, that as the moon, for all those darker parts we call her spots, gives us a much greater light than the stars that seem all luminous; so will the Scripture, for all its obscure passages, afford the Christian and divine more light than the brightest human authors.

To dispatch, since the Scripture is both a naturally proper, and an instituted instrument to convey revealed knowledge to the studiers of it; and in it many clear passages may instruct ordinary capacities, and its darker ones may either recompense more inquisitive wits or humble them; I see not, why the obscureness of a small part of it should deter any sort of pious persons from the perusal of the whole. And as the Word of God is termed a light,[2] so hath it this property of what it is called, that both the plainest rustics may, if they will not wilfully shut their eyes, by the benefit

[1] 2 Kings, v. 12. [2] Psal. cxix. 105; and Prov. vi. 23.

of its light direct their steps, and the deepest philosophers may be exercised, if not posed and dazzled with its abstruser mysteries. For thus in the Scripture the ignorant may learn all requisite knowledge, and the most knowing may learn to discern their ignorance.

THE SECOND OBJECTION.

To proceed now to the second objection against the style of Scripture: the seemingly disjointed method of that book is by many much cavilled at; to which, were the supposal a truth, I might reply, that the book of grace doth but therein resemble the book of nature, wherein the stars (however astronomers have been pleased to form their constellations) are not more nicely or methodically placed than the passages of Scripture: that where there is nothing but choice flowers, in what order soever you find them, they will make a good posy: that it became not the majesty of God to suffer himself to be fettered to human laws of method, which, devised only for our own narrow and low conceptions, would sometimes be improper for and injurious to his, who may well say, as he doth in the prophet, that his thoughts are so far from being ours, that 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than our thoughts:[1] that as a mixture of ambergris and musk is more redolent than the single ingredients; and as in compound medicines, (as mithridate and treacle,) the mixture gives the electuary a higher virtue than the severed drugs possessed; so often-

[1] Isa. lv. 8, 9.

times in morality and divinity, a complication of precept and example, of rhetoric and mystery, may operate better than their distinction would. And sure we should judge that man a very captious creature, that should take exception at a proffered sum, only because the half-crowns, shillings, and sixpences were not sorted in distinct heaps, but huddled into one. This, I say, with much more, might be represented, were the Scripture series as destitute of method, as is pretended: but the truth is, that the method though it be not pedantically nice, is proper and excellent; if the goodness of a method be to be judged less by the order of the sections than its being in order to the author's end, and never swerved from but upon sufficient ground, or for some mysterious purpose: the laws of order in the Scripture being rarely declined, but as the laws of nature are in the world, for man's instruction. The historical dislocations have their particular reasons, and, for the most part are accounted for by judicious expositors: and as for the frequent, and sometimes long, digressions, excepted against in the Epistles of St. Paul, were he a bare human writer, I should possibly attribute his frequent excursions to his fulness upon all subjects, not his want of skill to prosecute any one, and compare his pen to those generous horses, who, though never so well managed, will ever be jetting out on this or that side of the path, not out of undisciplinedness, but purely out of mettle: but looking upon St. Paul under another notion, I shall rather choose to tell you, that as rivers are said to run to the sea, though oftentimes the interposition of hard or rising grounds or other obstacles, force them to such winding meanders, that they seem to

retreat from the ocean they tend to; which nevertheless with increased streams they afterwards bend again their intermitted course to, having watered and fertilized by their passage the grounds through which they seemed to wander; so our apostle, though he direct his discourse to his main scope, may not only without declining it, but in order to it, for in some cases the wisdom of the proverb will inform us, that the longest way about is the nearest way home, seem for awhile to abandon it, by fetching a compass to answer some obvious or anticipate some tacit objection, and afterwards more prosperously resume his former considerations, now strengthened by the defeat of the interposing scruples, having, by the by, happily illustrated and enriched those subjects which his incidental excursions led him occasionally to handle. I must add, that in St. Paul's, as in the rest of the inspired writings, the mere want of heeding the Holy Ghost's way of writing, makes the method appear to us at a very great disadvantage. For in the historical part of Scripture, when the order of time is interrupted, those *προθύτερα*, *προλήψεις* and *επάνοδοι*, and such dislocations, are used oftentimes only to comply with the connexion of the matter; and either dispatch all that belongs to the same long narrative at once, or else to join passages allied in some other circumstance, though severed in that of time; and sometimes too, things are inserted which do not readily seem pertinent to the series of the discourse, but are extremely so to some scope of the author, and afford much light and excellent hints to the reader. Sometimes the coherence, where it appears defective, may be very well made out by rendering Hebrew verbs (and

some Greek aorists) in a preterpluperfect sense instead of a perfect; or by some such other grammatical variation of the words, as all that understand Hebrew well know to be allowed by the propriety of that tongue, which ignores divers moods and tenses, &c. of our western languages. Sometimes that which seems incoherent to a discourse, serves really to prevent a foreseen (though perhaps not always obvious) probability of misapplication of it; and so must not be judged impertinent to a doctrine which it hinders from being either scrupled at or abused. Sometimes the prophets, in the midst of the mention of particular mercies promised to, or judgments denounced against the people of God, sally out into pathetical excursions relating to the Messias, which seem extremely abrupt and incoherent with the rest, to them that consider not how seasonable the mention of Christ may be, both in the mention of the mercies of God, of which he is the foundation and pinnacle, the ground and consummation, (and the promise made of him, taught the faithful to reason thus with his apostle: 'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'[1]) and amidst the threats of the judgments of God, in which he was his people's grand consolation. Sometimes ὁ διδάσκαλος, the teacher, that bishop of our souls,[2] who was in the supreme degree of perfection, which St. Paul required of a bishop, διδακτικὸς, both fit and forward to teach,[3] takes a rise from any invitation, either of a word, expression, or theme, though belonging to

[1] Rom. viii. 32. [2] 2 Pet. ii. 25
[3] 1 Tim. iii. 2.

his own first subject, to give further instructions, by digressing a little to that occasional and intervening theme; which however it related to his matter, suited very well with his merciful inclinations to instruct dim mortals. Sometimes, nay oftentimes, the inspired discoursers seem to say things, not only incoherent, but contradictory; (as is very remarkable in divers of St. Paul's epistles, where he seems to praise and dispraise the same persons;) whereas addressing themselves to mixed assemblies, wherein (as Noah and Ham in the ark, and the tares and the wheat in *agro dominico*) there were both good and bad men, heretics, especially Gnostics, and orthodox Christians, they only so wisely dispensed and tempered their discourse, that both these sorts of persons might find something in what was in general terms delivered, to appropriate to themselves in particular, which application was necessarily left to their own consciences to make. Sometimes the order is in Scripture much disturbed or injured by the omission or misplacing of a parenthesis. For there not being any in the Hebrew copies, nor (as it is thought) in the original Greek ones, the publishers of the several editions of the Bible, have placed parentheses as they have judged most convenient; some including in them what others leave out of them; and some making long ones where others make none at all; and perhaps none of them have been so happy as to leave no room for alterations that may deserve the title of corrections and amendments. And sometimes too, the seeming immethodicalness of the New Testament, (not to determine any thing of the antiquity, which is certainly

great, and the authority of the accents and partition of the Old Testament, because amongst very able critics *adhuc sub judice lis est)* is due to the inconvenient distinction of chapters and verses now in use; which though it be a very great help to the memory, and be some other ways serviceable, yet being of no greater antiquity than its contriver, Stephanus, and being (though now of general use) but of private authority, and by him drawn up in haste, it will be perhaps no slander to that industrious promoter of heavenly learning, to say, he hath sometimes severed matters that should have been left united, and united others which more conveniently he might have severed, and that his lucky attempt ought not to lay any restraint upon other learned men, from making use of the same liberty he took in altering the former partitions (for of them I speak, not of the punctuation) of the New Testament, in altering his alterations to the best advantage of the sense or method. The analytical works of some (I wish I could say many) judicious expositors and divines upon the Scripture, may sufficiently manifest its being generally reducible enough to a perspicuous order; and that it conforms to the known laws of method, where its diviner one doth not transcend them. And it were not impossible for me to give divers instances to manifest, that as the north star, though it be less luminous than many others, yet, by reason of its position, doth better guide the pilot than even the moon herself: so are there some texts in Scripture which, though less conspicuous in themselves, are, by reason of their relation to a context, more instructive than other more radiant passages, to

which these would be much inferior, if they were not as well considerable for their being *there* as such.

THE THIRD OBJECTION.

Allied to their objection who find fault with the Scripture for being immethodical, is theirs who would fain persuade us, that it is seldom coherent, and scarce any where discursive. And I have observed with trouble, that even some pious readers are easily tempted to look upon the Bible as barely a repository of sentences and clauses, where divine truths lie huddled, and not ranged, and are too ready to apply to its texts the title Nero gave Seneca's style, of *arena sine calce*: "sand without lime." Whereas an intelligent and attentive peruser may clearly enough discern, both that the prophets and apostles do make frequent deductions and inferences, and that their arguments, though not cast into mood and figure, are oftentimes as cogent as theirs that use to make syllogisms in Barbara. I frequently entertain myself with both those authors, and yet methinks St. Paul reasons as solidly and as acutely as Aristotle: and certainly, according to David's logic, 'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that framed the eye, shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?'[1]—the first and grand Author of reason should as well know how to manage and disclose that faculty, as they that possess it but by participation, and glister so but with some few

[1] Psalm xciv. 7, 10.

condescending beams, vouchsafed by that bright sun, who is indeed the 'Father of lights, from which each good and perfect gift descends.'[1] But on this occasion to point at a few particulars, I consider,

1. That some ratiocinations of Scriptures remain undiscerned or misunderstood, because of our unacquaintedness with the figurative, and oftentimes, abrupt way of arguing usual amongst the eastern people, who in their arguments used to leave much to the discretion and collection of those they dealt with, and discoursed at a wide distance from the logical forms of our European schools, as to persons versed in their writings cannot but be notorious.

2. That the seeming incoherency of many ratiocinations proceeds purely from the misrendering of the original particles, especially of the Hebrew conjunction copulative *vau*, or *vaf*, (as it is diversely pronounced by the Jews, of whom I shall here advertise you once for all, that they have confessed to me, they differ in pronouncing Hebrew, not only from the Christians, but exceedingly from one another,) for there is hardly any of those particles that hath not, besides the obvious, various other significations, of which, if that were skilfully and freely in every text taken up that would *there* afford the best sense, the Scripture would, I am confident, appear much more coherent and argumentative than translations or expositors are wont to make it: and though I did but consider how many thousand times the particle *vaf* is used in the Scripture, and that it doth not only (though it do primarily) signify "and,"

[1] James, i. 17.

but hath also (I speak within compass) four or five and twenty other significations (as "that," "but," "or," "so," "when," "therefore," "yet," "then," "because," "now," "as," "though," &c. and that the sense only gives it this great diversity of acceptations; I cannot but think that if we always allowed ourselves an equal freedom in rendering it, where the motive (which is the exigency or conveniency of the sense) is the same, the dexterous use and rendering of that one particle, would make no small number of texts both better understood and more esteemed.

3. That sometimes, (especially in Solomon's and St. Paul's writings,) in many passages so penned as to contain (like Seneca's) a tacit kind of dialogue, that is unskilfully by readers, and even interpreters, taken for an argument or an assertion which is indeed an objection. And that such a mistake must mightily discompose the contexture of a discourse, even a raw logician need not be told.

4. That the omission or misplacing of parentheses (which the Hebrew text altogether wanting, interpreters have supplied and used at their own discretion) makes the Scripture oftentimes appear less discursive, as well as (what we elsewhere complain of) less methodical. And the like may be said of the points of interrogation. For whether it be true or no what the critics esteem, that in the original Greek copies of the New Testament there were no such points, (as indeed I have found them wanting in the ancientest manuscripts I have seen,) it is certain that in our modern copies, both Greek and translated, the authors of several editions have variously placed them as themselves thought fit;

and though instead of the interrogative point, the Hebrews make use of their interrogative *he;* yet that the sense of the words, and a certain supposed modulation, do oftentimes make an interrogation where that *he* is wanting, an Hebrician can scarcely ignore, no more than a logician, that the interrogation is not always supplied to the best advantage of the Scripture's logic.

5. That the apostles and other inspired discoursers in the Bible, divers times use arguments, not to convince opposers, but to confirm believers: for the persons they reason with being such, oftentimes, as esteem them teachers sent from God, upon whose score all they teach exacts belief, they may without irrationality use arguments to confirm in their doctrine men already acquiescing in the principles of it, and persuaded of their integrity, sufficiency, and authority, that it would be improper to urge against a refractory disbeliever, that is convinced of none of these. And as masters often use in instructing their scholars, arguments they would forbear to insist on against a professed antagonist; so the apostles, dealing with those that thought them inspired teachers, and fully instructed in the mysteries of Scripture and the designed dispensations of God, might justly draw inferences not to be urged against an infidel, from a doctrine first delivered by themselves, or from a text or passage wherein those they reasoned with justly supposed they might know more of the mind and counsel of God than other men, and would teach nothing as such that was not so.

6. That arguments exquisite and (as artists term them) apodictical had been oftentimes less proper in discourses, which being addressed to popular

auditories, required rather popular arguments; which the inspired discoursers employ, but as likely to be better understood, and more prevalent than those which are so logical that they require logicians to relish them. Where teaching and persuading is the design, not only the native cogency of a ratiocination is to be considered, but its proportion to their spirits it is addressed to, and its aptitude to work upon them. For as a spider will catch flies better than a hawk can, as a cat is more fit to destroy mice than a greyhound, though this be stronger and swifter; and as the crowing of a cock will (according to famous naturalists) sooner fright a lion than the bellowing of a bull, though the latter be much the more terrifying noise, and proceed from the more formidable animal; so oftentimes weaker and popular arguments succeed better with a resembling auditory than the irrefragablest syllogisms.

7. That divers Scripture arguments do not logically and cogently prove the thing they would persuade, merely because they were meant only for what logicians call *argumenta ad hominem;* (reasonings designed not so properly to demonstrate the opinion they contend for, irrelatively and abstractedly considered, as to convince of the truth of that opinion the persons they are addressed to;) and consequently the inspired discoursers arguing *è concessis,* from principles conceded and confessed by those they reason with, though the principles should be unsolid, the ratiocination is not. Thus there are divers texts of the Old Testament applied to Christ in the New, which, though they did not now inevitably conclude against the present Jews, were without any illogicalness employed against their ances-

tors, because then the relation of those passages to the Messias was so acknowledged, that there needed but the pertinent applications made of them in the New Testament; whereas the refractoriness of the succeeding Jews hath taught them to devise so many sophistical evasions to elude the texts we speak of, that they now dispute not only the application of them, but the explication too. St. Jude argues with the rodomonts of his time, out of the story of the archangels' and the devil's contest about the body of Moses; and though perhaps that story be (like the Jewish book whence it seems not improbable it was taken) somewhat apocryphal, yet as long as they reverenced it, it was not irrational in him to urge them with it, and employ it to the redargution of their insolence. And as although there be nothing less solid and more fickle than the wind, yet the skilful pilot diligently observes it, and makes it drive on his ship more forcibly than the powerfulest and best contrived engines in the world could: so though there be scarce any thing more groundless and unstable than popular opinions and persuasions, yet a wise teacher neglects them not, and may sometimes make such use of them, as to draw thence arguments more operative than the accuratest syllogisms logic could devise. And indeed the most convincing proofs of assertions being ever afforded by the mediums wherein both parties agree, not only Socrates in Plato's Dialogues, but dexterous discoursers generally have often elected the drawing of inferences from the opinions and concessions of those they dealt with, as the most persuasive and successful way of arguing, to all which I shall add,

8. That another thing which very generally keeps men from discerning the reasonings, and consequently oftentimes the reasonableness and true sense, of Scripture texts is, the shyness of divines to let the context and the speaker's scope regulate their choice amongst all the various, though not equally obvious, significations of ambiguous words and phrases. It is not that, as far as I have observed, men almost of all religions are not wont to make bold with, and perhaps for a need to strain or wrest, phrases and words of Scripture, when the giving them less usual notions may fit them to serve their turns; but the mischief is, that they decline the commonest acceptations, but to make the texts they quit them in symphonise with their tenets, not with their neighbouring texts. It were, methinks, impartialler, if the frequenter meaning of an expression be to be waved, as oftentimes it must, for one less current, to do this to make the Scripture coherent or discursive: and then, for our opinions, rather to conform them to the sense of the Scripture than wrest the words of Scripture to them. But perhaps this impartiality would silence too many of our clamorous controversies, by showing some to be groundless and others undeterminable, to be likely to take place in the heated spirits of men; some of whom, I fear, whilst their feuds and fierceness last, would be willinger to have the texts of Scripture loose stones, which they may more easily throw at their adversaries, than built up into a structure, wherein they must lose that convenience, (it being difficult to pluck stones out of a building,) though reason herself were the architect.

But to leave these eager disputants to their ani-

mosities, we shall again repeat, that the Bible loses much by not being considered as a system. For though many other books are comparable to cloth, in which by a small pattern we may safely judge of the whole piece, yet the Bible is like a fair suit of arras, of which though a shred may assure you of the fineness of the colours and richness of the stuff, yet the hangings never appear to their true advantage, but when they are displayed to their full dimensions, and seen together.

These things, Theophilus, among many others, may be represented on the behalf of the Scripture, against those who will needs censure it as a collection, not to say a heap, of immethodical and incoherent passages. But lest you should suspect me of partiality, I shall ingenuously confess to you, that there are some things in the economy of Scripture, that do somewhat distress my reason to find a satisfactory account of; and that there are very few things wherein my curiosity is more concerned, and would more welcome a resolution in. But when I remember how many things I once thought incoherent, in which I now think I discern a close, though mystic, connexion; when I reflect on the Author and the ends of the Scripture, and when I allow myself to imagine how exquisite a symmetry, though as yet undiscerned by me, Omniscience doth, and after ages probably will discover in the Scriptures' method, in spite of those seeming discomposures that now puzzle me; when I think upon all this, I say, I think it just to check my forward thoughts, that would either presume to know all the recluse ends of Omniscience, or peremptorily judge of the fitness of means to ends unknown; and am reduced to think that economy

the wisest, that is chosen by a wisdom so boundless that it can at once survey all expedients, and so unbiassed that it hath no interest to choose any but for its being fittest. I shall annex, that I think those must derogate hugely from the Scripture, who only consider the sense of the particular sections, or even books of it: for, I conceive that, as in a lovely face, though the eye, the nose, the lips, and the other parts singly looked on may beget delight and deserve praise, yet the whole face must necessarily lose much by not being seen all together; so, though the severed leaves and portions of Scripture do irrelatively and in themselves sufficiently betray and evidence their own heavenly extraction, yet he that shall attentively survey that whole body of canonical writings we now call the Bible, and shall judiciously in their system compare and confer them to each other, may discern upon the whole matter so admirable a contexture and disposition, as may manifest that book to be the work of the same wisdom that so accurately composed the book of nature, and so divinely contrived this vast fabric of the world. The books of Scripture illustrate and expound each other; Genesis and the Apocalypse are in some things reciprocal commentaries; as in trigonometry the distantest side and angle use best to help us to the knowledge one of the other; and as in the mariner's compass, the needle's extremity, though it seem to point purposely but at the north, doth yet at the same time discover both east and west, as distant as they are from it, and from each other: so do some texts of Scripture guide us to the intelligence of others, from which they are widely distant in the Bible, and seem so in the sense.

It is as high as pious a satisfaction to observe how the sacred penmen supply each other's omissions, (as is very observable in the four Evangelist's mention of the genealogy of Christ,) according to God's degrees and seasons in dispensing the knowledge of his truths and mysteries in the several ages of the church; (to which he at first vouchsafed 'but a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn,'[1] and to which these mutual irradiations and secret references persuade, that all these reputed authors had their pens guided by an omniscient hand, and were but the several secretaries of the same enditer,) and to find in writers severed by so many ages and regions, a harmony whose dissonances serve but to manifest the sincerity and unconspiringness of the writers. And truly for my part I am professedly enough an impartialist, not to stick to confess to you, Theophilus, that I read the Bible and the learnedest expositors on it, with somewhat particular aims and dispositions. For besides that I come not to them with a crowd of articles which I am there resolved to find or make arguments to defend, with the overthrow of all antagonists, esteeming it less safe to carry my opinions to the Scriptures than to take them up there: besides this, I say, though I neglect not those clear passages or arguments that may establish the doctrine of that church I most adhere to, yet I am much less busied and concerned to collect those subtle glosses or inferences that can but enable me to serve one subdivision of Christians against another, than heedfully to make such observations, as may solidly justify to my own

[1] 2 Pet. i. 19.

thoughts, and improve in them, a reverence for the Scripture itself, and Christianity in general: such observations as may disclose to me in the Bible, and the grand articles clearly delivered in it, a majesty and an excellency becoming God himself, and transcending any other author; and such observations, (to dispatch,) as may unveil to me in the Scripture, and what it treats of, that πολυποίκιλος σοφία τῦ Θεῦ, 'manifold wisdom of God,'[1] which even the angels learn by the church. These are, I confess, the things, as to speculative divinity, that I gladliest meet with, and take the heedfullest notice of, in the writings of divines, of whatsoever religion, that owns the Scripture,—for in this I am almost equally gratified by the abler expositors of all dissenting sects;—for I can scarce think any pains mispent that brings me in solid evidences of that great truth, that the Scripture is the Word of God, which is, indeed, the grand fundamental; all other articles generally thought so, being, if truths, better deducible from this one, than this from any of them. And I use the Scripture, not as an arsenal, to be resorted to only for arms and weapons to defend this party, or defeat its enemies, but as a matchless temple, where I delight to be, to contemplate the beauty, the symmetry, and the magnificence of the structure, and to increase my awe and excite my devotion to the Deity there preached and adored.

THE FOURTH OBJECTION.

The apostle of the Gentiles teaching us that the whole Scripture, for so I should rather English the

[1] Ephes. iii. 10.

Πᾶσα γραφὴ, is θεόπνευστος, 'divinely inspired, and is profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;'[1] and the apostle of the circumcision assuring us that, 'Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;'[2] we are not to believe that so divine an enditer, by secretaries, most of them conspicuous by the gifts of prophecy or miracles, would solemnly publish to the world and for his church, any thing that ought indeed to be accounted impertinent or useless. And yet of these qualities, some persons, more bold than learned and considerate, are pleased to impeach many passages of Scripture. But truly that God who was so precisely exact in the dimensions, proportions, and all other circumstances of the ancient tabernacle, though it were but a typical and temporary structure, ought to be supposed at least as careful to let nothing superfluous intrude into those volumes, which being consigned to the church for the perpetual use and instruction of it, must contain nothing unconducive to those designs, the least text in it being as contributory to the completing of the Bible, as every loop or pin was to the perfection of the tabernacle. God, by so great a condescension to the weakness of our capacities and memories, as the withholding from the canon so many writings of Solomon, and so many of the oracles and miracles of our Saviour; and by so strangely preserving the whole Scripture, (for the books pretended to be lost, though written by

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16. [2] 2 Pet. i. 21.

never so holy men, are either in our Bibles extant under other names, or cannot be demonstrated to have ever been canonical; that is, entrusted with the church as the infallible rule of faith and life,) does, methinks, abundantly evince his design of inchasing nothing there that hath no tendency to his people's instruction. Were not my discourse confined by my occasions and the fear of distressing your patience, to somewhat narrow limits, I could easily by several instances of texts, seemingly useless, show how much men have been mistaken in imagining them such. Many passages that at the first or second reading I could find or guess no uses of, at the third or fourth I have discovered so pregnant in them, that I almost equally admired the richness of those texts, and my not discerning it sooner. A superficial and cursory perusal presents us many things as trivial or superfluous, which a perspicacious reflection discloses to be mysterious. And of so precious a quality is the knowledge of Scripture, that no one part of it ought to be esteemed useless, if it may but facilitate or improve the understanding of any other: divine truths being of that worth, that the knowledge and acquist of a few of them as much outvalues a greater knowledge of other things, as a jeweller's skill and stock is preferred before a mason's. And I consider here, that as the Bible was not written for any one particular time or people, but for the whole church militant diffused through all nations and ages; as many passages (as those opposed to the Zabian's magical rites) have at first been necessary for the Jews, which lose the degree, at least, of that quality for us; so there are many others very useful which will not perhaps be found

so these many ages; being possibly reserved, by the prophetic Spirit that endited them, (and whose omniscience comprises and unites in one prospect all times and all events,) to quell some future foreseen heresy, which will not perhaps be born till we be dead, or resolve some yet unformed doubt, or confound some error that hath not yet a name: so that all the parts of Scripture are useful in some ages, and some in all. We read in the gospel, that at the first institution of the eucharist, it was expressly said to the disciples concerning the sacramental wine, 'Drink ye all of it,'[1] whereas upon the exhibition of the bread the particle 'all' is omitted.[2] This difference, it is like, the primitive Christians marvelled at, and discerning no reason for it, might be tempted to think the passage useless or superfluous; but we that live in an age wherein the cup is denied to much the greater part of the communicants, are invited not only to absolve the recording of this particularity, but to admire it. The ceremonial law, with all its mystic rites, (which, like the manger to the shepherds, holds forth, wrapped in his swathing-clothes, the infant Jesus,[3]) to many that bestow the reading on it, seems scarce worth it; yet what use the apostles made of it with the Jews, and how necessary the knowledge of it is yet to us, in our controversies with them, he that is any thing versed in them cannot ignore. And let me tell you, Theophilus, that those fundamental controversies are both more necessary and more worthy a wise man's study, than most of those comparatively trifling ones that

[1] Math. xxvi. 27. [2] Mark, xiv. 23.
[3] Luke, ii.

at present so miserably (not to say causelessly) distract Christendom. How many passages of the prophets, by lazy readers, are thought to have no use, which, as the star did the wise men,[1] lead the attentive considerers to Christ; and so loudly and harmoniously, together with Moses's typic shades, utter those words of the Baptist, 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world,'[2] that I meet with numerous passages in the New Testament, to which I cannot but apply what St. Matthew notes upon his narrative of our Saviour's apprehension, 'All this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled;'[3] or rather, now all this was so done that they were fulfilled; (for so oftentimes the context commands us to render the ἵνα in these citations;) and which recal to my mind the history of the transfiguration; for as there the apostles at first saw Moses and Elias talking with Jesus, but at the second view (when the cloud was withdrawn, and he had spoken to them) 'saw none but Jesus only;'[4] so such passages as I am speaking of, in the law, the prophets, and the gospel, at first survey appear very distinct things, but upon a second inspection, and the access of more light from an attentive collation of things, they do all, as it were, vanish into Christ; 'of whom (to use an apostle's terms) Moses in the law, and the prophets did write;'[5] and at whom those types and those predictions pointed. Those instances of the Old Testament, of the confused or dislocated mention of known pedigrees and stories, were possibly useless, and even

[1] Matt. ii. [2] John, i. 29. [3] Matt. xxvi. 56.
[4] Matt. xvii. 3, 8. [5] John, i. 55.

troublesome to the ancient Jews, but serve us extremely to silence the cavils of the modern ones, when they would invalidate the New Testament's authority; because in St. Stephen's narrative, and some of the Evangelist's genealogies, the Holy Ghost is pleased to employ in the New Testament that obscure strain he had often used in the Old: and sure as insultingly as the Jews use to urge against us objections of that nature, I could readily retaliate and repay them in the same coin, were there no common enemy that might be advantaged by our quarrel, and employ either's arguments against both. And as there are divers prophetical passages in the Revelation, which we know as little the use as meaning of, which yet doubtlessly our posterity will not find barren, when once the accomplishment shall have proved the expositor of those predictions, whose event will (if it do nothing else) attest the omniscience of their inspirer: so possibly, of many Mosaic constitutions, whereof we Christians find excellent uses, most of the old Jews scarce knew any; at least my conversation with our modern rabbies shows me that they, whilst they obstinately decline referring them to the Messias, can scarce make any more of the inspired and mysterious laws of Moses (except those that relate to the Zabian superstition; with which, too, most of their doctors are as unacquainted as ours) than the Egyptians or Gymnosophists could of their sacrifices and other ritual devotions.

It is not that I think all the books that constitute the Bible, of equal necessity or equal usefulness, because they are of equal extraction; or that I esteem the church would lose as much in the prophecy of Nahum, as that of Isaiah; or in the

Book of Ruth, as in the Epistle to the Romans, or the Gospel of John; as the fixed stars themselves, though of the same heaven, are not all of the same magnitude and lustre: but I esteem all the constituent books of Scripture necessary to the canon of it; as two eyes, two ears, and the rest of the members are all necessary to the body; without divers of which it may *be*, but not be so *perfect*, and which are all of great, though not of equal usefulness. And perhaps it might without too much hyperbole be said yet further; that as amongst the stars that shine in the firmament, though there be a disparity of greatness compared to one another, yet they are all of them lucid and celestial bodies, and the least of them far vaster than any thing on earth; so of the two Testaments that compose the Bible, though there may be some disparity in relation to themselves, yet are they both, heavenly and instructive volumes, and inestimably outvaluing any the earth affords, or human pens ever traced. And I must add, that as mineralists observe, that rich mines are wont to lie hid in those grounds whose surface bears no fruit-trees, (too much maligned by the arsenical and resembling fumes,) nor is well stored with useful plants or verdure, as if God would endear those ill-favoured lands by giving them great portions; so divers passages of Holy Writ, which appear barren and unpromising to our first survey, and hold not obviously forth instructions or promises, being by a sedulous artist searched into, (and the original word ἐρευνᾶν, used in that text of 'search the Scriptures,'[1] does properly enough signify the

[1] John v. 39.

searching for hid treasure,) afford out of their penetrated bowels, rich and precious mysteries of divinity.

THE FIFTH OBJECTION.

The next thing imputed to the Scripture is, that it contains many things trivial or impertinent: and it is not impossible, but that some things may seem so, though they are not: of this sort are disjointed speeches and abrupt transitions observed in many of our Saviour's discourses; in which also we sometimes read him to have answered, without being asked the question, (though that be otherwise salvable by a critic,) and sometimes to have answered to a quite other question than that he was asked. But this is not to be thought an absurdity, but an excellency in the replies of Christ, who possessing the prerogative of discerning hearts, did preach after that rate: his oratory took a shorter way than ours can follow it in: he prosecuted his designs by altering his discourses, and wisely measured the fitness of his heavenly sermons, by their relation to his end, not his theme. For as he knew his hearers' thoughts, he addressed himself to them, and reaching them in their earliest formation, and as it were, their first cradle, before they had leisure to pass into the tongue, he not more convinced his auditory by answering their thoughts, than by thus manifesting that he knew them. Of his so much undervalued parables, some, if not most, do, like those oysters that besides the meat they afford us, contain pearls, not only include excellent moralities, but comprise important prophecies. The parable of the preg-

nant grain of mustard-seed that so suddenly grew to so large a plant, was a now fulfilled prediction of the admirably swift progress of the Gospel,[1] which from despicable beginnings, soon prospered to a height that rendered it almost as fit an object for wonder as for faith. That other parable of the treacherous husbandmen, clearly foretold Christ's death by the Jews' malice, and their destruction for it.[2] And I despair not to see unheeded prophecies disclosed in others of them, especially being informed that there is a critic, Monsieur A. B. now at work upon a design of manifesting many otherwise interpreted passages of the New Testament to be prophecies, of whom no less than the famousest of the modern rabbies, Menasse Ben-Israel, (one time I made him a visit at his own house in Amsterdam,) gave me this character, that he took him for the ablest person of the Christians. Those historical circumstances quarrelled with in Christ's parables are like the feathers that wing our arrows, which though they pierce not like the head, but seem slight things, and of a differing matter from the rest, are yet requisite to make the shaft to pierce, and do both convey it to and penetrate the mark. But nothing is thought more impertinent in Scripture than the frequent repetitions. But the learned need not to be told, that many things seem to the ignorant bare repetitions, which yet ever bring along with them some light or some accession: in that comparable to the stars, which as like as they seem to vulgar gazers, are by the skilful astrologer taught to contain, under that

[1] Matt. xiii. 31, 32. [2] Matt. xxi. 33.

colour and figure common to them all, very peculiar and distinct influences. I here also consider, that in all languages there are some customary geminations and expressions, which, though to strangers they appear superfluous, if not absurd; to the natives, and in the propriety of that speech, are not only current but oftentimes emphatical. I find withal, that there is scarce any of these seeming impertinencies, of which a learned and judicious expositor cannot assign a pertinent cause or reason. And I consider, too, that the books of Scripture being endited, not all at once, but at very several and distant times; according to the known saying, that *Nunquam satis docetur quod nunquam satis discitur*, 'Nothing can be sufficiently taught which is not sufficiently learned;' the repetition of the same sins and errors, required that of the same menaces and dissuasions, whose frequent enforcing, serving both to attest and to convince the sinner's obstinacy, was not a bare repeating, but such a redoubling as we are fain to use to drive in a nail to the head; and the words of the wise are, in the wise man's words, 'As nails fastened by the masters of assemblies,'[1] where though in all the renewed strokes the busy hammer gives, the act be still the same, yet is no blow superfluous, the number of them serving to complete their operation. They that in perusing books have the learning and skill to strip them of what oratory or stealth hath dressed and disguised them in, will easily discern most of them to be but varied repetitions; which, for my part, I find differing from those of Scripture, but in that the

[1] Ecc. xii. 11.

latter do in the same words generally comprise new matter, whereas the former usually present us stale matter in new words. And I consider further, that our own sad experience showing us, that there is no single text of Scripture that subtler heretics' sophistry cannot plausibly enough elude; the Holy Ghost foreseeing this from the beginning, hath mercifully and wisely provided, that the fundamental truths of faith and manners should be held forth in so many places and in so much variety of expressions, that one or other of them must unavoidably intercept those evasions, and escape those misconstructions, that sophistry may put upon the rest; which providence alone hath preserved many articles from the attempts of heretics, making them both blush to question and despair to disprove a truth attested by more than two or three witnesses, and giving orthodox believers the satisfaction of having their anchor tied to a threefold cord which is not easily broken. Most of the Bible's repetitions (or inculcations rather) teach us something or other untaught before; and as in Pharaoh's vision,[1] though both the ears and the kine signified the same thing, yet Joseph's interpretation shows that neither was superfluous, even those few that teach us nothing else, teach us at least the importance, or some other attribute, of those repeated points we were taught before. And I scruple not to compare the expressions of the Scripture to a rose, where though so many leaves nearly resemble each other, there is not one of them but contributes to the beauty and perfection of the flower.

[1] Gen. iv. 25, 31.

THE SIXTH OBJECTION,

Of contradictions presumed betwixt passages of Scripture.—I am not unacquainted with the קרו *Keri*, and the כתיב *Cethib*, nor the תקון ספרים *Tikkûn Soph'rîm*, in the Old Testament, nor yet with the *variæ lectiones*, especially those of the eastern and western Jews, as they are called, taken notice of by modern critics in the Hebrew text of the old, as well as in the Greek of the New Testament. I am not neither altogether a stranger to the difficulties to be met with in making good the citations we find made of divers texts of the former of those sacred instruments in the latter; in which they seem not unfrequently to differ much from what we find extant in the ancient Testament, as to the words, and sometimes too as to the sense. These things, I say, though by some much urged against the Scripture, I am not ignorant of. But I think it not fit to consider them in this place, not only because those that are much better qualified for such a work than I, have done it already, but because these objections relating rather to the truth or the authority than to the style of the Scripture, the nature of my present task does not oblige me to examine them. Especially, since I have already said something of them, and may say more, in what I write on the behalf of the Christian religion. And it is upon these grounds, Theophilus, that I also decline at present the consideration of what is wont to be objected, as if there were a great many self-contradictions to be met with in the Scripture. Only I shall in the meantime invite you to take notice with me, that it is not often-

times so much the various aspects of the texts, as the divers prepossessions and interests of the expositors that make books seem replenished with interfering passages and contradictions. For, if once the theme treated of do highly concern men's interests, let the book be as clear as it can, subtle and engaged persons on both sides, perusing it with forestalled judgments or biassed passions, will be sure to wrest many passages to countenance their prejudices, and serve their ends, though they make the texts never so fiercely fall out with one another, to reconcile them to their partial glosses. Of this I might produce an eminent instance in Aristotle's physical writings, alleged by so many dissenting sects of schoolmen to countenance their jarring opinions; the injured Stagirite, employed as second by every one that quotes him, being by every sect brought to fight with its antagonists, and by them all to give battle to himself. Thus do the dissenting sects of Mahometans quarrel as well about the sense of their Alcoran as we do about that of our Bible, and make the one as much a nose of wax as the Roman Catholics say we make the other. Which brings unto my mind, that not only the δυσνόητα τινα, the 'some things hard to be understood,' in St. Paul's Epistles, but also the λόιπαι γράφαι, 'the other Scriptures' are by St. Peter said to be by the 'unlearned and unstable wrested to their own destruction.'[1] When a sober author finds an impartial reader, who takes his words in their genuinely obvious acceptation, wherever the context doth not manifestly force another on them, in which then

[1] 2 Peter, iii. 16.

the reader acquiesces, the writer is easily understood; but when nimble and forestalled wits peruse an author, not to sit down with his sense, but to make him speak theirs, whether it be his own or no, and giving themselves the pains and leisure of considering all the possible acceptations of a word or phrase, and the liberty of pitching upon that which best serves their present turn, allow themselves to conclude, that because it may signify so and so elsewhere, therefore it does so here; an author must be much warier than Homer and Virgil, whom Eudocia and Alexander Ross have made evangelists, to keep his words from being tortured into a confession of what was never in his thoughts. And a very pregnant instance of this truth we may observe in the law of our land, whose very end being to prevent or abolish strifes, and which being written so punctually and expressly, and in so peculiar and barbarous a style, clogged with supernumerary repetitions, that nothing but their being conducive to so good an end could make it supportable, is yet by men's concerned wits so misconstrued and perverted, that not only in private men's cases we see the judges so puzzled that suits oftentimes outlast lustres; but the prince's party and the subjects kill and execute one another; and, as charity tempts me to presume, think they may do so by the law, and do so for the law. In this belief, that we often impute to the Scripture our own faults or deficiences, the instances of those anti-scripturists I have conversed with, have very much confirmed me; though I have still esteemed that the best as well as shortest way, is not to wrangle with them about every nicety, where the defeat of their objections give us no victory over

their incredulity, and by but evidencing the Scripture's not being either false or absurd, can serve but to justify our reverence to them, not to impart it; but by solidly asserting the divine origination of the Scripture, reduce men to ascribe their scruples to the true cause, and persuade us to the temper of the apostles, who, when Christ had uttered a hard saying, which so unsettled many of his disciples that they deserted him upon it; though (their gross misapprehensions of numerous other much less obscure passages will easily persuade us,) they relished it not aright, yet would by no means forsake him for their master, because, says their spokesman, Peter, 'thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe, and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God:'[1] teaching us with one grand and comprehensive truth, to silence particular scruples. And one thing would not be unworthy our objectors' considering; that the truth and authority of the Scriptures, and consequently their not being contradictory to themselves, hath, as we may elsewhere have occasion to manifest more at large, been immemorially believed by the learnedest men in the world, many of whom may be very reasonably supposed to have examined opinions without any other concern in their inquiries than that of not being deceived, or any other end than that of finding out the truth, and most of whom, though by their sedulousness and their erudition they discovered difficulties in the Bible that our querists could never have dreamt of; yet did they all conclude the belief of the Scriptures, grounded

[1] John, vi. 60, 66, 68, 69.

on as much reason as is consistent with a due latitude for the exercise of faith, which possibly needs some dimness or reluctancy in the understanding, to be an acceptable virtue of the will; faith and the twilight seeming to agree in this property, that a mixture of darkness is requisite to both, which too refulgent a light would destroy, the one vanishing into knowledge, as the other into day. And now faith thus casually presents herself in my way, it will, perhaps, not be impertinent to observe, that Christ often deals with new believers as he is recorded to have done with Nathanael; for, as when that guileless Israelite had acknowledged him the Messias, upon the bare evidence of his having been discerned by him under the fig-tree, our blessed Saviour tells him, 'Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these;'[1] which in the next verse he proceeds to mention; so when men once have embraced the persuasion of the Scripture's being divinely inspired, that faith is a thing so acceptable to God, that he often discovers to them, to confirm them in their belief, arguments much clearer than those that induced them to it, and convinces them of the reasonableness of having submitted their reason to him that gave it them. And, as if there were mysteries in which faith doth more prosperously make way for understanding, than that is set a-work to introduce faith, it happens to them as it did to the two blind men mentioned in the Gospel, in whom our Saviour first required faith, and having found that he then opened their eyes.[2]

[1] John, i. 50. [2] Matt. ix. 27, &c.

THE SEVENTH OBJECTION.

From the (not long since mentioned) frequent repetitions to be met with in the Scripture, and from the unusual method wherein the Author of it has thought fit that the divine truths and precepts should be extant there, divers have been pleased to take occasion to criminate the Bible, as if, its bulk considered, it were but a barren book, wherein instructions are but sparingly scattered in comparison of what is to be met with in divers other writings, where repetitions are avoided, and more of useful matter is delivered in fewer words. And hence it is (say these objectors) that many persons unquestionably religious, choose rather to study other books of devotion and morality, as containing more full and instructive precepts of good life.

I might answer this allegation by representing, that the several particulars whereon the accusation is grounded, having been already examined by me, I need not say any thing distinctly to this accumulative charge. But because I would not only defend my veneration for the Scripture, but persuade it, I shall on this occasion offer two or three things to consideration.

Although then the Scripture were less replenished with excellent doctrines, and were but, as well as the best of other books, like mines, in the richest of which the golden ore is mingled with store of less precious materials, (and needs a laborious separation from them,) yet sure it would, like those mines, deserve to be carefully digged in: and it will become the grateful Christian's zeal to imitate

him in the parable, who having found 'a treasure hid in a field,'[1] stuck at no price within his power, to purchase the whole field for the treasure's sake.

But God be praised, this is not the case, for it is only our ignorance, our laziness, or our indevotion, that keeps us from discovering, that the Scripture is so far from being, as the objectors would have it, a wilderness or a barren soil, that it may be much more fitly compared to that blessed land of promise, which is so often said in Scripture to be 'flowing with milk and honey,' things useful and delightful; if not to paradise itself, of which it is said, that there 'the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden.'[2] And indeed, as the author of it was omniscient, so experience has taught that he has so much expressed himself to be so in the Scripture, that the more knowing its pious studiers have been, the greater store of excellent truths they have met with in it; the Scripture being indeed like heaven, where the better our eyes and telescopes are, the more lights we discover. And that this may not appear to be said *gratis*, let us consider, that a book may be instructive as well by teaching its readers speculative truths as practical ones, and that Christians ought as well to know what God would have us think of him and of his works, as what he would have them do. Now as it is past question that there are no speculative truths of so noble and elevated a nature as those that have God himself for their object, so there is no book from whence there is so much to be learned, as there is from the

[1] Matt. xiii. 44. [2] Gen. ii. 9.

Bible, of the nature, and even the thoughts of God, and of those deep mysteries into which, as I formerly noted from St. Peter, the angels themselves are greedy of prying.[1] Nay, there is no other book whatsoever that teaches us any thing at all, concerning divers of these sublime subjects, that may be safely relied on, save in what it is beholden to the Scripture for. So that we cannot, without an extreme injury, look upon that book as barren, which alone contains all those revealed truths, which are of so noble and precious a nature, that we justly prize the composures of heathen philosophers, and other authors, for being enriched with guesses at some few of them, though much embased by the alloy whereto the truths conjecturally delivered are made liable, from the imperfections of writers always fallible, and for the most part, in some degree or other, actually erroneous. But of this more perchance elsewhere. Wherefore I shall now add, that whereas those we reason with are pleased to prefer other books of morality and devotion before the Scripture, in reference to good life; they would probably be of another mind, if they duly considered, that to engage men to live well and holily there is much more requisite than barely to tell them that they ought to do so, and how they should do it. For since to lead a life truly virtuous requires, in many cases, that we deny and overcome our natural appetites and inclinations, and requires also constancy in a course that is confessedly wont to be attended with many hardships and dangers, it is not sufficient to engage a man to a good life to give him precepts of it;

[1] 1 Pet. i. 12.

which do not so much (what is yet the main thing in this case) make men willing to conform to such precepts, as suppose them so. And he that can do no more, does far less than him who, besides the rules of good life, presents men the highest and the most prevalent motives to embrace piety and virtue, and the most powerful dissuasives from all that is wicked, by proposing to us such rewards and punishments, and satisfying us that we ought, according as we behave ourselves, to expect either the one or the other; as to convince us that we cannot be either wise or happy but by being good, nor avoid the greatest of miseries but by avoiding vice. Now as we shall see anon, that as to the precepts of good life, the Bible is not unfurnished with them, so as to that most operative part of the way of teaching good life, the proposing of the most prevalent motives to good, and the most powerful dissuasives from evil; not only no other book does, but no book not inspired can perform in that kind any thing near so much as the Scripture alone; since we have not the same reason to believe any mere man as we have to believe God, touching those rewards and punishments which he reserves after death for those that conform to, or disobey his laws; these being matters which (whatever philosophers and other learned men may have thought to the contrary) depend upon his free will, and consequently are not to be explicitly known, but by his revelation; which he has not, that appears, vouchsafed us in any other book than the Scripture. And therefore it is not to be wondered at, that St. Paul should ascribe it to our Saviour, Christ, 'that he had brought life and im-

mortality to light through the gospel.'[1] And whereas hope is that spur without which men do scarce ever cheerfully undertake and resolutely go through things, much less difficult and dangerous than those which a virtuous course of life is wont to expose men to, St. Peter makes a Christian's highest hope to depend upon a revealed truth, where he gives thanks to God for having, 'according to his abundant mercy, begot us to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'[2] And what influence such a knowledge of God and Christ, as, if we have it at all, we must owe to the Scripture, and such hopes and promises as none but God himself, or those he sends, can give a wary and intelligent person, may have upon good life, you may guess by that other passage of the same apostle, where not only he mentions God's having, 'according to his divine power, (or efficacy,) given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue,'[3] but also immediately after speaks of our being made 'partakers of the divine nature,' and 'escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust,' by those exceeding great and precious promises that are given of God unto us. So that although the Scripture did not expressly give us such moral documents as ethical writers do, and taught us good life but by acquainting us with what God has revealed in those writings concerning himself, and by convincingly proposing to us those highest

[1] 2 Tim. i. 10. [2] 1 Pet. i. 3.
[3] 2 Pet. i. 3, 4.

inducements to embrace a good, and shun an evil life, which (though reason may perchance make some weak and confused guesses at them) revelation only can make examining men confidently depend upon; if, I say, the Scripture did no more than thus engage us to resolve upon a good life, leaving us to derive the particular precepts of virtue from the inward dictates of the law of nature, and the exercise of our own reason, (which two together may well teach us almost as much as ethical books are wont to teach, of really and considerably useful,) the Scripture ought yet to be esteemed a most instructive book in reference to good life! As in effect we see, that the writings of no philosopher or orator ever made any thing near so many persons virtuous as the New Testament, though but a pocket-book, has been able to do; especially in those primitive ages of the church, when those that received that book were less diverted from it than since they have been by the reading of others. The moon may, in clear weather, lend a gardener light enough to dig and manure his orchard, and perhaps to prune his trees, but none will say that the moon does as much contribute to his labouring to produce fruit as the sun; since this nobler planet not only affords him light to work by, and a comfortable warmth whilst he is working, but animates him by the hopes he cherishes upon the sun's account, that in due season his diligence and toils shall be rewarded. The application is too obvious to need to be insisted on.

But though, upon the forementioned accounts alone, the Scripture would deserve to be looked upon as highly conducive to the practice of piety and virtue, yet it is far from being true that it is

destitute of such moral documents, which it needs not, to deserve to be looked upon as a book very instructive in reference to good life: for there being two sorts of virtues requisite to an embracer of the gospel, which have been conveniently enough called for distinction sake, the one Christian, and the other moral or ethical, I suppose it will not be doubted but that the rules of those virtues that are properly Christian, must be sought for in the Scripture; that being acknowledged by Protestants to have such a sufficiency as to matters of mere revelation, (which restriction too many do inconsiderately enough leave out,) that in matters of that nature, divines often do, and in many cases may, argue negatively, as well as affirmatively from the Scripture; which eases us of many things obtruded as duties, merely by its not either expressly or by consequence imposing them upon us. So that, as to things of this nature, there is such a fulness in that book, that oftentimes it says much by saying nothing, and not only its expressions but its silences are teaching; like a dial, in which the shadow as well as the light informs us. Nor must we think that the Bible is destitute of the best sort of such precepts, exhortations, and dissuasives as we prize in ethical books, because they are not expressed and ranged in the Bible, as they are wont to be in systematical composures; for not only there is extant in the Scripture, to them that know how to constellate those lights, a very excellent body of moral precepts, but there are likewise scattered the forciblest motives to the several duties, and the most retracting dissuasives from the contrary vices. And truly, it hath long lessened my esteem of our heathen morals, that the ethics being

but the doctrine of regulating our passions and directing our faculties, in order to the attainment of felicity, they have been hitherto handled by those to whom the nature of the faculties and passions of the mind was but very little known: whereas to the author of the Scripture morals, the frame and springs, and faculties of our souls, being intuitively and most perfectly known, the most proper and powerful ways of working on them cannot be unknown to him: and then, certainly, one unacquainted with the trade, will be much less likely to mend a watch that is out of order than a watchmaker. And indeed, even in reference to that other sort of virtues which are wont in the more confined sense of the word to be called moral, there are I know not how many excellent notions and directions relating to them, dispersed up and down in the Scripture, though by reason of their not being drawn up by themselves, and of their being mingled with other matters, they are not so readily taken notice of by ordinary readers. Whereas, those studious perusers that search the Scriptures with a due diligence and attention, are not only wont easily enough to descry the moral counsels and prescriptions overlooked by the other readers, but take notice of many excellent documents that are plainly enough intimated or hinted there, to knowing and diligent perusers, though not clearly and expressly enough to be found of those that think them not worth seeking.

Wherefore, as to those religious persons mentioned in the last proposed objection, I cannot but think that by neglecting the Scripture for ethical composures, or even books of devotion, they as well wrong themselves as the Scripture; and therefore

I shall take leave to think the worse, rather of the practice of the men than of the book of God. Scarce any thing has given me a favourabler character of Luther, than his wish, that all his books of devotion were burnt, when he once perceived that the people's fondness and over-valuation of them produced a neglect of the study of the Bible; to which you will find, Theophilus, that the best of that nature being compared, are but (not to draw to our present purpose that of Seneca to his mother, *Paribus intervallis omnia divina, ab omnibus humanis distant:*[1] "All things divine are distant from all things human by an equal, that is, infinite interval") like the stars compared to the sun, whose emanations confer on them their lustre, but whose presence drowns it: for though I deny not books of devotion a due degree of praise and usefulness, yet I refuse them the superlative degree of either; and since the writers of the best of that kind of composures, either steal their best things from, or acknowledge that they borrowed them of the Bible, I would not have Christians neglect the fountain for the streams, and unwisely, as well as unthankfully, elect to read God's word, rather in any book than his own, in which to encourage us to study the precepts of a virtuous and holy life, we have such peculiar and encouraging invitations. St. Paul seems to make it the end and the result of the several usefulnesses he attributes to the Scripture, 'that it can make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;' and is able, (as he speaks a little higher) σοφίσαι εις σωτηρίαν, 'to make us wise unto salvation.'[2] There

[1] Seneca de Cons. ad Helviam. cap. ix.
[2] 2 Tim. iii. 15, 17.

are indeed many excellent instructions given us in other books; but they giving us directions only towards the attainment of the advantages, conveniences, and ornaments of life, the ignorance of them, only makes us miss those particular ends, whereto they give addresses, or whereof they facilitate our pursuits; but the knowledge whose acquist or neglect imports endless joys or torments we need seek only from the Scripture: a Christian to understand the duty of his faith and life, needing to understand no other book than the Bible; though indeed to understand the Bible well, it is ordinarily requisite, that a pretty number of other books be understood. Christians, then, have reason to study most that book, which understood, all others are needless to salvation, and which ignored, they are insufficient. If St. Peter's vision had been a reality, he would scarce, hungry as he was, have ranged abroad to hunt in this desert or that forest for game, when he had a vessel let down to him from heaven, containing in itself all manner of four-footed beasts, and other objects of appetite, attended with a commanding invitation from heaven, 'Rise, Peter, kill, and eat.'[1] So when God sends us from heaven, in one volume, an at least virtual collection of all those divine truths and holy precepts others scatteringly and sparingly glean out of human books, the Christian cannot but prize a book so comprehensive, which by making it safe for him to ignore others, by so merited an *antonomasia*, wears the title of "the book," (for so the Bible signifies in Greek, as the Hebrews call it *Mikra*, which by excellence signifies "what is to

[1] Acts, x. 11, 12, 13.

be read."[1] . . . . . There are precepts enough of virtue, and motives enough to conform to them, held forth in the Bible, if the contents of that divine book were believed and considered as they ought to be. It is a mistake to think that a large system of ethics, dissected according to the nice prescriptions of logic, and methodically replenished with definitions, divisions, distinctions, and syllogisms, is requisite or sufficient to make men virtuous. Too many of our moralists write as if they thought virtue could be taught as easily, and much in the same way as grammar; and leaving our rational motives to virtue, and determents from vice, with other things that have a genuine influence on the minds and manners of men, they fall to wrangle about the titles and precedencies of the parts of ethical philosophy, and things extrinsical enough to vice and virtue: they spend more time in asserting their method, than the prerogatives of virtue above vice; they seem more solicitous how to order their chapters than their reader's actions, and are more industrious to impress their doctrine on our memories than our affections, and teach us better to dispute of our passions than with them. Whereas, as the condition of a monarch, who is possessed but of one kingdom or province, is preferable to that of a geographer, though he be able to discourse theoretically of the dimensions, situation, and motion, or stability of the whole terrestrial globe, to carve it into zones, climates, and parallels, to enumerate the various names and etymologies of its various regions, and give an account of the extent, the confines, the figure, the divisions, &c. of

[1] Mikra, Lectio.

all the dominions and provinces of it; so the actual possession of one virtue is preferable to the bare speculative knowledge of them all. Their master, Aristotle, hath herein been more plain and less pedantic, who (by the favour of his interpreters) hath not been nice in the method of his ethics. And indeed, but little theory is essentially requisite to the being virtuous, provided it be duly understood, and cordially put in practice: reason and discretion sufficing, analogically to extend and apply it to the particular occurrences of life; (which otherwise being so near infinite as to be indefinite, are not so easily specifiable in rules;) as the view of the single pole-star directs the heedful pilot, in almost all the various courses of navigation. And the systems of moralists may (in this particular) not unfitly be compared to heaven, where there are luminaries and stars obvious to all eyes, that diffuse beams sufficient to light us in most ways; and as I that with modern astronomers, by an excellent telescope, have beheld perhaps near a hundred stars in the pleiades, where common eyes see but six; and have often discerned in the milky-way, and other pale parts of the firmament, numberless little stars generally unseen, receive yet from heaven no more light useful to travel by than other men enjoy; so there are certain grand principles and maxims in the ethics, which both are generally conspicuous, and generally afford men much light and much direction; but the numerous little notions (admit them truths) suggested by scholarship to ethical writers, and by them to us, though the speculation be not unpleasant, afford us very little peculiar light to guide our actions by. When I remember those ancient heroes that have ennobled secular, and are enno-

bled by sacred story, and whose examples suggested the precepts of virtue, before there were any written ones to conform to; I am tempted to say, that virtue was scarce ever better practised than whilst men had not yet talked of the definition of it; as many an alchymist begs with rare notions of the nature of gold, which fills the coffers of merchants that never saw mine nor furnace. The grand precepts of morality are fruitful seeds, which industriously cultivated, will bring forth fruits still affording other seeds. And as for the motives to pious, and dissuasions from sinful practices, though out of the many voluminous books of morality, there may be divers collected, not extant in the Bible; yet may a dexterous reader find in that heavenly book, many more invitations to virtue, and determents from vice, than most men are aware of; and some of them of an importance that renders one of them as much more considerable than many ordinary ones; as one fair pearl out of a jeweller's shop, outvalues a score of those little pearls that druggists sell by the ounce; or doth comprise many inferior inducements, (which wise men judge not of by tale but value,) as a piece doth twenty shillings. And though human authors do often, in their parenetical treatises, allow themselves to be lavish in ornaments, to expatiate into amplifications, and to drain commonplaces; yet whilst they want an intimate admission, all these are too often unable to reform, I say not those that read them, but even those that write them; whereas the experience of the primitive and heroical ages of the church does gloriously manifest, that the inducements and dissuasives held forth in the Bible, though destitute of

those embellishments and advantages, where they are conscionably entertained and seriously pondered, are sufficient to raise virtue to a pitch philosophy durst scarcely aim at. Nor indeed is the number great of pertinent and rational incitements or determents, relating to virtue; and in discourses that have them for theme, how far soever the bows may extend, yet generally the knot lies in a little compass; and the analyzer that shall crack many of those composures, having severed the shells, shall find their kernels to be much alike. What this writer compares to one thing, that writer likens to another: those ungrateful persons towards God, that one resembles to swine, who eat the acorns without ever looking up to the tree they fall from; another compares to cattle, that drink of the streams without considering what fountain they flow from. These but present us several dresses of virtue and vice, where, though the novelty and variety of habit serve to engage attention in all, and want not influence, at least, upon easy and flexible natures, yet in considerate and discerning persons, they alter not much the notion under which the qualities themselves are entertained. Nor will such be apt to quarrel with the author of the Scripture, because the motives and dissuasives extant there, are many of them old and known, or frequently repeated, the efficacy of them being so too. Were it not strange a physician should decline exhibiting of mithridate, because it was a known medicine, and famous for its cures many ages since? Doth bread less nourish us, or is it less used, because it was, as men suppose, contemporary to Adam, and the most common food of all nations in all ages? And as to the repetition

of the same allegations and inducements, as often as men's condition returned to need them, the paucity of ponderous considerations in the ethics, often necessitating either (disguised perhaps, yet) repetitions of the same, or the substitution of those that must be much inferior to be new; such persons as little admire that reiterated employment of the same truths, as they would to see a soldier use a sword, though he and legions many ages before him have constantly made use of that weapon; or a general encourage his engaging soldiers, by representing to them honour, duty, spoil, necessity, and those other known topics used by himself at the head of his army, as often as he had occasion to lead it on to fight. To all this I am invited by this occasion to subjoin, that upon the score of God's being both an omniscient Spirit and the supreme lawgiver to the whole creation, the same truths, counsels, exhortations, dissuasions, &c. oftentimes have, and always ought to have, another guess efficacy and prevalence on a Christian reader, when he finds them in the Scripture, than if he should meet with the same in the books of heathen moralists, though learned and eloquent. And certainly, those that with such reverence read the writings of those great wits of antiquity, that have made the greatest discoveries of truth, because they believe them to have been endowed with very illuminated intellectuals, ought to pay them, and a book published by an omniscient enditer, a reverence somewhat proportionate to the disparity of their authors. Since men (as Elihu speaks in Job) 'are but of yesterday, and know little or nothing;' a wary person reads the wisest authors with a reflection, that they may deceive him by

being themselves deceived; and undergoes a double labour, the one in investigating the meaning, and the other in examining the truth of what they deliver: but in the Bible, we are eased of the latter of these troubles; for if we find the sense of a text of Scripture, we cannot miss a truth; being never deceived by that book but when we deceive ourselves by presuming we understand it when indeed we do not. I am otherwise affected to find the vanity of the world proclaimed and depreciated by him that enjoyed all the delights and glories of it, than when I meet with the same truth from some beggarly cynic, that never was admitted to taste those luscious and bewitching pleasures, and needs no great philosophy to despise a world he judges of by the scant share the narrowness of his condition allows him of the joys of it; and of which, consequently, his criminations should as little move, as a blind man's of a blackamoor; whom though he may, perchance, truly style ugly, yet he were of a somewhat easy faith that should think her so, barely upon the testimony of so incompetent a witness. Thus, when God himself is pleased to reveal what is vice or virtue, sublime or despicable, truth or falsehood, happiness or misery, I have another guess acquiescence in his decisions, than in the same met with in a human author, who, having necessarily frailties and passions, is both obnoxious to mistake and capable to deceive. And therefore it is no wonder that the slighting of God's dictates should receive an aggravation, upon the score of their being his; as our Saviour gave the precedency of the Ninevites converted by Jonah, to them that repented not at his preaching,

because he was 'a greater than Jonah.'[1] And therefore, though I have formerly been no very negligent peruser of books of morality; yet knowing that they have a power but to persuade, not to command, and that the penalties of sin or death are not inseparably annexed to the disobedience of their prescriptions, I confess I often find myself but faintly wrought on by them. For I must acknowledge, that frequently assuming the liberty of questioning the reasonableness of what human writers, whether philosophers or fathers, are pleased to impose upon us, I find those specious and boasted allegations, the apothegms of the sages, the placits of the philosophers, the examples of eminent persons, the pretty similes, quaint allegories, and quick sentences of fine wits, I find all these topics, I say, such two-edged weapons, that they are as well applicable to the service of falsehood as of truth, and may by ready wits be brought equally to countenance contrary assertions. And really, most moralists, except in those few duties that nature herself hath foretaught us, to a man whose restless curiosity leads his enquiries to all times and nations, will appear little other than fencers with wit; (I mean those that have any;) for each of these popular topics, is such an unsolid or uncertain foundation, that one man can build little on it that an equally able antagonist may not, with as specious probability overthrow. And I fear, most of us have but too often found our corruptions sophisters enough to elude any such thing that pressed *that* as a duty which they had

[1] Matt. xii. 42.

no mind we should peform. But when I find any thing enjoined in the Scripture, my consciousness to its being imposed by that 'Father of Spirits,' (who has both right to enact laws, which must be therefore just, because he enacts them; and power to punish the transgression of them with no less than eternal death,) I then leave roving, and see where to cast anchor; I think it my part, without disputing them, to obey his orders, and acquiesce more in that imperious ἄνρος ἔφη, 'Thus saith the Lord,' than a whole dialogue of Plato, or an epistle of Seneca. I therefore love to build my ethics, as well as my creed, upon the rock; and esteeming nothing but the true, proper, and strict sense of the Scripture, and what is convincingly deducible from it, to be indispensably obligatory, either as (in matters of mere revelation) to faith or practice, it is no wonder if I study God's will most in that book wherein alone I think it revealed: and, truly, finding in myself no motive more justly prevalent to obedience than his right to exact it that requires it, few men are more ready than I in distinguishing what indeed God says from what man would make him say. And if I allow myself such liberty to discern the text from the gloss, in the writings of our vulgar interpreters, (of most of whose comments, for reasons prosecuted in another paper, I am no great idolater,) and even of the fathers of the church; I hope I shall not need to tell Theophilus, that in all other moralists I like the freedom to like or disapprove, as upon examination, my impartialest reason relishes them; or that I frequently fear their harangues will hardly

[1] Heb. xii. 9.

pass for demonstrations with those wary testers, that like not to be cheated so much as into virtue; but choose to act as rational or Christians, as well in relation to the inducements as to the nature of what they do.

. . . . . Amongst the thirteen articles of the Jewish creed, one acknowledges the very expressions of the law, or Pentateuch, to have been inspired by God. That saying of the rabbins is not altogether so hyperbolical as a perfunctory reader would imagine,—that upon each tittle of the law whole mountains of doctrine hang. I shall not mention as any proof of this, the strange mysteries they fancy in the strange accenting of the ten commandments in the original, since their soberer doctors have in free discourse confessed to me, that it is as much a riddle to them as us. Nor shall I insist upon the Jews reducing the whole law to six hundred and thirteen precepts, affirmative and negative, according to the number of the letters of the decalogue, thereby insinuating that all the laws that regulate man's duty are virtually or reductively comprised there; although this rabbinical notion (not to call it whimsey) be in such request amongst them, and so known to those that are any thing conversant in Jewish authors, that I have sometimes suspected that the conceit entertained by so many Christian divines, that all the precepts that relate to any part of the whole duty of man, are but just consequences deducible from the decalogue, had its rise thence. But I shall not, as I said, ground my opinion of the pregnant instructiveness of the Scripture upon such questionable, not to say altogether proofless conceits. That which may better persuade a con-

sidering man is, that besides those more resplendent and obvious truths, wherewith the Scripture does evidently abound, there are many instructions exhibited, many truths asserted, many errors confuted, and many mysteries hinted in the very expressions of Holy Writ, to an inquisitive and concerned peruser, which a heedless vulgar reader is not wont to take notice of. God, who in the Scripture is said, 'to cover himself with light as with a garment,'[1] justifies that expression in the Scripture, where (as the first words that he is recorded to have ever spoken were יהי אור *yehi-or*, 'Let there be light'[2]) the very words and phrases, that clothe the sense are not alone emphatical, but oftentimes mysterious. The apostle assures us, 'whatsoever things were written,' even in the Old Testament, 'were written for our learning.'[3] But yet, besides those many particular sentences of the Bible that are not destitute of instructions, there are some so pregnant with them, that we may easily find this difference betwixt them and human writings, that those first-mentioned contain more matter than words, and the other more words than matter. Nay, many of the very flowers of rhetoric growing there, have (like the marigold that in hot countries points at the sun) a virtue of hinting the usefulest and the sublimest truths: the Bible being in this like the tree of life, (flourishing in the New Jerusalem,) which not only afforded seasonable fruit, but of which the very 'leaves were for the healing of the nations.'[4] As for those who have in this and the last age made bold to depreciate the Old Testa-

[1] Psalm civ. 2. [2] Gen. i. 3. [3] Rom. xv. 4. [4] Rev. xxii. 2.

ment, by pretending that to Christians, the New is sufficient; I am at present apt to think that the doctrine of the gospel, together with the light of nature, (which it excludes not but rather supposes,) contains all those duties which are absolutely necessary to be performed by all Christians, in order to salvation. And that consequently, many divines, both Catholics and reformed, do inconsiderately enough press many things enacted in the Old Testament, as laws properly so called, which are not now, upon the score of their being there enacted, obligatory to us Christians, nor perhaps ever were to any but the Jews, and some kind of Jewish proselytes. But I think withal, that though it be hard to show that any thing is a necessary duty to Christians, in the sense above declared, if it cannot be shown to be so either by the New Testament or the light of nature; yet not only there are many particulars relating to such duties, of which the Old Testament may excellently assist us to give ourselves a more distinct and explicit instruction than is easy to be collected from the New; but of the mysteries of our religion there are many things delivered more expressly or more fully in some passages of the Old Testament, than in any of the gospel, as I could easily evidence, if I thought it requisite. So that the use of it is very great, as to the *credenda* in divinity, though not perhaps absolutely necessary as to the *agenda*. But I consider further, that both the matters and the expressions made use of in the Old Testament, are so very frequently and almost upon all occasions related to in the New, (as if the wisdom of God were like rivers and seas, that affect to flow in the same channels themselves had made before,) that there is

scarce a page of the latter, to the better understanding of which the study of the former is not either absolutely necessary, or at least highly useful. Should God be pleased to instruct us as he did Jonas, by the shadow of a weed,[1] it were our duty to acquiesce; how much more, then, when he vouchsafes to speak to us in almost as glorious a manner as he did to Moses; in a Scripture that hath such resemblances to the sanctuary, which contained the law of God, exhibited the mercy-seat, (the type of Christ,) and wherein the two golden cherubims, like the two precious and harmonious Testaments, looked towards one another, and both towards that mercy-seat that typified the Messias![2] We should therefore, not only with acquiescence, but gratitude, look upon God's having appointed the Scripture to be the light in which his Spirit regularly shines upon his church; since the luminary is as well refulgent as the choice of it His whose blessing can prosper any means of grace, as without his blessing no means of grace can prosper.

And, Theophilus, since among those that are so far mistaken as to postpone the study of the Bible to that of some applauded books of morality and devotion, there are not wanting divers persons otherwise eminently religious; I hope you will easily excuse me, if for fear their example should prove a temptation to you, and add to the discouragements you must expect from the darkness of some texts and the opposition that will be given you, especially at first, by the grand enemy to the Author and design of the Scripture, I venture to

[1] Jonah, iv. 6. [2] Exod. xxv. 16—22.

superadd to all that I have said already concerning these men's practice, that it is not only a commendable, but a much more improving custom than it is by many thought, to read daily and orderly some set portion or chapters of the Bible: and not to desist from that practice, though (as Naaman dipped himself six times in Jordan, without being cured[1]) we should not perceive a sudden and sensible benefit accruing from it; for in diseases, bodily or spiritual, though the mouth be out of taste, and cannot relish what is taken in, yet wholesome aliments must be eaten, and do effectively nourish and strengthen, though they be then insipid (perhaps bitter) to the distempered palate. We must with the eunuch read divers texts we understand not when we read them;[2] and though at first we be not able to penetrate the senses of some portions of God's word, we must at least make our faculties as hospitable to it as we can; and make our memories admit and embrace it, till our understandings be grown up to do the like: it becoming the disciples of our Saviour, herein to imitate his holy mother; of whom it is written, that 'They (the blessed Virgin and her husband) understood not the sayings which he spake unto them, ——— but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart;'[3] and to think it may very well be, that as our Saviour said to Peter, 'What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter;'[4] so by the welcome he disposes you to give his word into your memory, he says to you, 'What I say thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter:'

[1] 2 Kings, v. 14. [2] Acts, viii. 30, 31.
[3] Luke, ii. 50, 51; see verses 18, 19. [4] John, xiii. 7.

and the apostle's motive to hospitality, 'Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares,'[1] will, without being overstretched, take in the texts of Scripture we are unacquainted with: for we may easily in them entertain, with Abraham and Lot,[2] greater guests than we were aware of; and who, when their true condition appears, may recompense our entertainment of them, by showering blessings on us, and rescuing us from the company and destiny of the wicked. And sure, if the pagans laid up with awful reverence, those dark and squinting oracles, that came (at least many of them) from the prince of darkness and father of lies, we should blush to refuse attentive pesusals and lodging in our memories, to those λόγια ζῶντα, those 'lively oracles,' those λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ, 'oracles of God,' who is 'the Father of lights,' and an essential truth 'that cannot lie.'[3] And the most enigmatical texts we meet with, which seem meant purposely to pose us, we may make useful admonitors of our weaknesses, and take for welcome opportunities to evince how great a reverence we pay God's word, upon the single score of its being so. Nor let those disturbances with which the devil seldom fails to obstruct or discourage our first progress in a study so ruinous to his malicious ends upon us, deter us; for these are commonly but the throes and strugglings of Christ new formed in us; or else like those horrid fits and outcries which preceded the ejection of that unclean spirit mentioned in the first of Mark:[4] such parting ceremonies being not

[1] Heb. xiii. 2. [2] Gen. xviii. and Gen. xix.
[3] Acts, vii. 38; Rom. iii. 2; James, i. 17; Tit. i. 2.
[4] Mark, i. 26.

unusual to the dislodging devil, who, when he finds himself upon the point of being expelled, 'hath great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time.'[1] And though 'the God of peace,' however he 'will bruise Satan under your feet shortly,'[2] should for a while try us even with desertions in the study of the Scripture; let us not for all that desert so improving a study, but resolutely persevere in the constant and faithful use of the means of grace: as the moon, when she suffers an eclipse, forsakes not her orb or motion, but by continuing her unretarded course, regains the irradiations she was deprived of. We find the word of God compared to seed, (that deathless seed by which Saint Peter saith we are born again,[3]) and that, we know, may seem for a long time as well dead as buried in the ground, and yet afterwards spring and grow up into a plentiful harvest. Nor must our proficiency any more dispense with us, from the being conversant with the Scripture, than our frailties: 'I will never,' saith the Psalmist, 'forget thy precepts, for with them thou hast quickened me.'[4] And, indeed, the word of God is not to be used like active physic, taken once that it may not be taken again; but it is compared to food, which indeed it is, of the soul; in which sense it may be literally enough said, 'that man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'[5] Now as our having fed never so well and heartily on excellent and nutritive meats yesterday, will not keep us from

[1] Rev. xii. 12. [2] Rom. xvi. 20.
[3] Matt. xiii. 19, 20, &c. 1 Pet. 1, 2, 3. [4] Psal. cix. 93.
[5] 1 Pet. ii. 2, and elsewhere; Matt. iv. 4.

needing to eat again to-day or to-morrow, and so daily, as long as we continue in these ruinous cottages of clay;[1] so in spiritual refections with full, without repeated meals the soul will scarcely thrive. And as, generally, the more healthy and lusty men are, the frequenter and stronger appetites they have; so the best Christians, and (witness David) the greatest proficients in Scripture knowledge, have the keenest stomachs to this food of souls; and the vigorousest piety, by a desuetude and neglect of it, is subject to faint and pine away.[2] Nor have we just cause to repine at any engagement to assiduity in the Scriptures; for there are not near so many things that will require, as there are that will deserve and recompense a serious study in a book, where both the strict sense and the circumstances and expressions that clothe it are richly instructive: like that aromatical fruit, of which not only the kernel is a nutmeg, but the very involving skin is mace. This inexhausted fulness, occasioned that panegyrical precept of the rabbies concerning the law; הפוך בה והפיך בה ארי כולי בה 'Turn it over, and again turn it over, for all is in it:' concurrently to which the Jew that translates the Arabian Apopthegms into Hebrew thus pronounces: "There proceedeth not a true sentence out of the mouths of this world's wise men, that is not intimated in our law."

The usefulness of divers texts is such, that we should not only have them in our possession, but in a readiness; and as David distressed by his mortal enemies, took Goliath's sword from near the ephod, to wear it withersoever he went, so

[1] Job. iv. 19. [2] Τροφὴ ψυχῆς ἡ γραφή. Athanas.

Christians, prosecuted by ghostly enemies, should be diligent, not only to have an armoury well furnished with spiritual weapons, but to wear this 'sword of the Spirit'[1] always by their sides, to ward and thrust with upon all occasions; without needing to depend upon any such things as concordances, which often cannot be come by, and oftener, not soon enough to keep us from being foiled by the father or the champions of lies. But now, to engage us to grow ready Scripturists, it is not only true, that as the texts of the Bible interchange light with one another, and every new degree of Scripture-knowledge, is not only an acquist of so much, but an instrument to acquire more; so is that book a theme so comprehensive and so fertile, that the last hour of a Christian's longest and industriousest life will still leave undiscovered mysteries in it: this, I say, is not only true, but it is also true that the doctrines of it are of that importance, and find that opposition in our depraved nature, that even those truths that require but few perusals to be understood, require many to be duly impressed: our preposterously partial memories being rarely like quicksilver, wherein nothing will sink but (that preciousest of metals) gold; for that alone is heavier than mercury. The word of Christ, must not be as a passenger,[2] or sparingly entertained in our minds, but must dwell there, and that richly: and the word, which Saint James pronounces, 'able to save our souls,'[3] he describes as a graff, which must not only be closely embraced, by that wherein it is to fructify, but must continue there, to bring the stock

[1] Ephes. vi. 17. [2] Col. iii. 16. [3] James, i. 21.

and graff to, if I may so speak, concorporate. And, indeed, we are so indisposed to admit, and so obnoxious to deface, religious impressions, that we need, during our whole life, be conversant with the precepts of leading it piously. But it is scarce more faulty in, than incident to the froward nature of man, to be ever quarrelling with God's method of prosecuting his intentions; and, as if he were wiser than his Maker, to criminate his conduct in his dispensations. Even that excellent person, the gloriousest of virgins and of mothers, whom all ages must deservedly call blessed, incurred her divine Son's reprehension, for an intimated offer to alter his purposed method in disclosing himself.[1] But God is too just to himself and too merciful to us to degrade, as it were, his omniscience so far as to suffer himself to be swayed against the dictates of it, by such purblind and perverse tutors as we: his goodness concerns him too much in our instruction, to suffer him to let our fancies endite his word: to attain his own ends, he makes choice of his own means and instruments, without needing our purblind eyes in the election; and what with unfathomable wisdom he hath been pleased to contrive for man's instruction, with a gracious though often misunderstood constancy he persists in. He knows that many who are disposed to cavil at the present contrivance or style of Scripture, would be apt to take exceptions at any other: for something or other it must necessarily be; and the unimaginable diversity of humours, judgments, and prepossessions is such, that as these now say, why thus, and

[1] Luke, i. 48; John, ii. 3, 4.

not so? others would, in case of alteration, be ready to ask, why so, and not thus? It is questionable, whether the Israelites were greater murmurers at Pharaoh in Egypt or at Moses in the desert: and the children complained of by their companions in the market-place, have had either posterity or predecessors in all ages,[1] which have still been of the disposition of those Jews, who imputed the more than prophet's rigidness of virtue to the great enemy of that lovely quality, and the greater than Solomon's condescensions to the vices he designed them to destroy. But the great physician of mankind is too compassionate and wise to let his distracted patients prescribe their own course of physic; or, to decline our fond and peevish quarrels, shuffle or discompose those mysterious and profound contrivances, whose wisdom engages the attention and exacts the wonders of those heavenly unclogged spirits,[2] that are scarce more advantaged over us by their native abilities than by the means they have of improving them. And, therefore our Saviour refused to descend from the cross, though they whose malice served to fix him there, the chief priests and scribes themselves, declared that on those terms they would believe on him.[3] And though we are but too apt to fancy that we should be won to our duty, if it were taught or pressed in such or such a way, yet we may be pleased to remember, that it was one in hell that would needs have another means than the Scripture of having sinners preached to, and one in heaven, that, referring them to the Scripture, declared, 'that if men heard not Moses and the

[1] Matt. xi. 16—19. [2] 1 Pet. i. 12.
[3] Matt, xxvii. 42.

prophets, neither would they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead to preach to them.'[1]

If I addressed what I write, not to so intelligent a person as Theophilus, but to promiscuous readers, I should add to what I have said of the several exceptions against the Scripture, a cordial advice to all, whose parts and leisure give them not a just hope of being able solidly to vindicate it either to themselves or others, to decline as much as discreetly they can, the listening to objectors or objections, of what sort or under what disguise soever, against that heavenly book, especially if proposed by plausible and insinuating wits. For it not being necessary, nor indeed possible, for every private Christian to know the opinions and reasons of all dissenters about the Scripture, no more than for every traveller to be a geographer; nor requisite to the knowledge of the way to heaven, to know all those in which they that miss it wander; (as to learn the way from Dover to London, I need not teach those that lead not thither;) it is not prudent to run a very probable hazard of disquieting one's faith, and a not improbable one of subverting it, only to gratify a needless curiosity, an itch, which we are delighted to have scratched, but which is exasperated by being so. And frequently, though your design seem innocent, as only to hear without believing, and please yourself with something of wit and novelty, yet these conversations rarely enough prove harmless, and, as too frequent and sad experience proclaims, generally either abate a degree of your faith, or qualify some ardour of your love, or lessen your reverence for that

[1] Luke, xvi. 31.

matchless book, or put some strange and disquieting scruples into your thoughts, which it is much easier to confute than to silence. Wherefore, as in infectious times, when the plague reigns, physicians use more strictly to forbid the smaller excesses and inordinances of diet, and the use of meats of ill digestion, or apt to breed any distemper, because every petty fever becomes, through the malignity of the air, apt to turn into the plague; so now that anti-scripturism grows so rife, and spreads so fast, I hope it will not appear unseasonable to advise those that tender the safety and serenity of their faith, to be more than ordinarily shy of being too venturous of any books, or company, that may derogate from their veneration of the Scripture; because by the predominant and contagious profaneness of the times, the least injurious opinions harboured of it are prone to degenerate into irreligion. But I fear you will think I preach.

THE EIGHTH AND LAST OBJECTION.

And now, Theophilus, I am arrived at that part of this discourse, wherein it will be fit to examine that grand objection against the style of the Scripture, which, though a philosopher would not look upon it as the most considerable, is yet most urged by many of its witty adversaries, especially such as are wont to exercise and gratify their fancy more than their reason. The objection itself is this, "That the Scripture is so unadorned with flowers of rhetoric, and so destitute of eloquence, that it is flat, and proves commonly inefficatious upon intelligent readers. Insomuch, that

divers great wits and great persons, especially statesmen, do either despise it, or neglect to study it;" and truly, the story is famous of that cardinal, who flourished in the last age, that said, that once indeed he had read the Bible, but if he were to do so again, it would lose him all his Latinity. And amongst those great orators, as they thought themselves, who lived in the same age and country that he did, the complaint was ordinary, that the reading of the Bible untaught them the purity of the Roman language, and corrupted their Ciceronian style. And I remember no obscure prince, though he shall here be nameless, because for other qualities I honour him, in no obscure company, disputed with me one day, an opinion about the style of the Scripture, to which the cardinal's scorn was a compliment. I wish these saucy expressions were but outlandish, and could not cross those seas that environ England, which is not so happily severed from the world's vices, as from its continent; this profane judging so boldly that book men shall be judged by, being, if not a native, yet at least a free denizen of England; for not only it was one, that I am sorry I can call our countryman, who is recorded to have solemnly preferred one of the odes of Pindarus before all the Psalms of David; but I could easily add divers resembling instances, that I have myself been troubled to meet with, were it not that I somewhat doubt whether this kind of profane sayings be not as well fitter as worthier to be forgotten than remembered, and to be suppressed than divulged; for, not to mention that the recording of such enormities puts an ill compliment upon mankind, the satisfaction some

men's curiosities receive by such relations, will scarce account for the temptation it gives others, to imitate what they find some had dared. For there are some sins whose grand determent is a kind of persuasion that they are too horrid to have been committed: and some wise legislators thought it better against certain crimes to use the silence of the laws than their threats. I shall therefore, without any further mention of scandalous particularities, take it for granted, that there have been, and are but too many witty disrespecters of the Scripture. But as for the accusation itself, which they are alleged to countenance, many defences might be here made against it, if divers considerations, pertinent to that purpose among others, did not belong to some of those ensuing parts of my discourse, wherein it is not the style of the Scripture, but other themes that are principally and directly treated of. Yet that you may be assisted to refer hither such parts of the following discourse as are applicable to the matter under consideration, I shall here take notice to you, that my answers to the objection above proposed may, for the most part, be reduced to these five heads of argument.

First, that as to divers parts of the Scripture, it was not requisite that they should be adorned with rhetorical embellishments.

Next, that the Bible seems to have much less eloquence than indeed it has, to those that read it only in translations, especially the vulgar Latin version.

Thirdly, that by reason of the differing notions several sorts of men, especially of distant nations

and climates,' have of eloquence, many passages that are thought uneloquent by us, may appear excellently expressed to another part of mankind.

Fourthly, that there are in the Scripture a multitude of those texts, wherein the author thought fit to employ the ornaments of language, conspicuously adorned with such as agree even with our notions of eloquence.

And lastly, that it is very far from being consonant to experience, that the style of the Scripture does make it unoperative upon the generality of its readers, if they be not faultily indisposed to receive impressions from it.

As to the first of these, having already above declared, that there are many parts of Scripture, wherein it would have been improper to affect eloquence; I am willing to suppose that you have not yet forgot what has been formerly said. And therefore I am unwilling to detain you on this first consideration. Yet I cannot but on this occasion take notice to you, that we allow all sorts of people expressions proper and fitted to their several professions and themes. How many of us can dwell on lawyers, physicians, and chymists' books, though oftentimes written in terms as harsh and as uncourtly as if those rudenesses were their design? and yet we can neglect and scorn the Scripture, because in some passages we there find the mysteries and other matters of religion, delivered in a proper and theological style. I remember Machiavel, in the dedication of his famous work, after he had (not causelessly) acknowledged to Lorenzo de Medici, (to whom his book is addressed,) that he had not stuffed it with lofty language or big words, nor adorned with any of those enveigling outward

ornaments, usual to other authors in their writings, gives this account of the plainness of his style, *Perche io ho voluto, o chè veruna cosa la honori (la mia opera) o che solamente la verità della materia, et la gravità del soggetto la faccia grata :* " that he thought fit either that nothing at all should recommend his work, or that the only truth of the discourse and the dignity of the subject should make it acceptable, and exact its welcome." If a mere statesman, writing to a prince upon a mere civil theme, could reasonably talk thus, with how much more reason may God expect a welcoming entertainment for the least adorned parts of a book, of which the truth is a direct emanation from the essential and supreme truth, and of which the contents concern no less than man's eternal happiness or misery? And if our nice Italian critics themselves cannot, by the plainness of Machiavel's style, nor the forbidding of his writings by the inquisition, be deterred from as assiduous as prohibited a study of his books, what excuse will they one day have, that now make the unaffected style of Scripture the sole excuse of their despising (or at least neglecting) that divine book?

Secondly, as to the disadvantage the Scripture receives by its not being read by those I now reason with, in their originals; though I have said something to it already, yet I must not resume it into consideration, and represent, that it is no wonder they reverence not the Bible style as they ought, whilst they judge of that of an Hebrew book by their vulgar translation; which (though sometimes causelessly enough censured by divers Protestant divines, that would find it no easy task to make a better, yet) certainly is in many places strangely

harsh and barbarous; and by a partial and unlucky affectation of literality, misseth the propriety both of the Hebrew speech and of the Latin: and to adhere to the original's words commonly injures its eloquence, and oftentimes its sense; rendering excellent expressions in such ungraceful ones as would probably fright readers from it, if it could not very well spare fine language: so that to our present theme we may not ill apply that notable saying of Mirandula, *Hebræi bibunt fontes, Græci rivos, Latini paludes.* The old French rhyming translation of Virgil, makes not the Æneids much more eloquent than Hopkins and Sternhold have made the Psalms: which sure, being written by a person who (setting aside his inspiration) was both a traveller, a courtier, and a poet, must at least be allowed to contain polished and fashionable expressions in their own language, how coarsely soever they have been misrendered in ours. What opinion the eastern world hath of the sweet singer of Israel, may appear both by other hyperbolical fictions they believe of him, (whom, with Moses, Jesus, and Mahomet, they reckon amongst the four great prophets,) and by what Kessæus (the famed Mahometan writer of the Lives of the Fathers) relates concerning him, "that when David sang the praises of God, the hills, and birds, and beasts therein accompanied him."[1] Which gross literal interpretation of figurative expressions in the Psalms, and of the Psalmist's pathetical invitations to the inanimate creatures to join with him in celebrating their common Creator, he seems to have borrowed from the Alcoran itself; where Mahomet brings

[1] Kessæus, page 99. See Psalm cxiv. 4; xix.

God in, saying, "We reduced the mountains to comply with him, who should join with him in praises morning and evening; the birds also flock to him; all these are obsequious to him."[1] And though the New Testament be not written in Hebrew, yet its writers being Hebrews, have chiefly conformed themselves to the style of the translators of the Old Testament (which whether or no it constitute what critics of late so dispute of under the name of *Lingua* or *Dialectus Hellenistica*, I pretend not to define) and that of the Apocryphal authors and other Jews writing in the same language; who (except, perhaps, Josephus and Philo) wrote rather, if I may so speak, a Hebrew than an Attic Greek; or, at least, in a dialect, which (by reason of their frequent references to the Septuagint's version) abounds, if not with Hebraisms, with expressions obvious in Hebrew writings, and unfrequent in Greek ones, and so relishes much of the Hebraic style; of which, as well in the New as the Old Testament, those we reason with, being strangers to that primitive tongue, must be incompetent judges; there being in the idiotisms of all languages, peculiar graces, which (like those most subtle spirits, which exhale in pouring essences out of one vessel into another) are lost in most (especially if literal) translations; and the holy tongue being that which God himself made choice of to dignify with his expressions, having divers whose penetrancy is as little transfusible into any other as the sun's dazzling brightness, or the water of a diamond can be undetractingly painted: and having divers words and phrases, whose pithiness and copiousness

[1] Surat. iii. vide H. Hottin. 62, and 63.

none in derived or other languages can match. Some of the Hebrew conjugations, as chiefly those called *hiphil* and *hithpaël*, give significations to verbs, which the want of answerable conjugations in western languages, makes us unable to fill or equal without paraphrases, which are very rarely so comprehensive as the original words; and (to hint this upon the by) the ignorance, or not considering of this one grammatical truth, hath kept men from fully understanding divers passages of the New Testament, wherein the Greek tongue's want of those conjugations, hath made active or intransitive verbs be used in a transitive or reciprocal signification. How impertinently men's ignorance of its originals may make them censure the Scripture, I had once occasion to take notice of, by finding a famous commentator note St. Paul of impropriety of speech, in the beginning of that which is commonly thought to be his first epistle to the Thessalonians, but by the learned Grotius (in his paradoxes, *De Antichristo)* not improbably esteemed to be his second: for whereas instead of the Greek words ἀφ' ὑμῶν ἐξήχηται ὁ λόγος τῦ κυρίυ, which ours have rightly Englished, 'From you sounded out the word;'[1] he found in his translation, *a vobis diffamatus est sermo*, not knowing Paul to have written in Greek, he would needs correct him for having written *diffamatus est*, instead of *divulgatus est.*

Thirdly, We may yet further consider, that as to many passages of Scripture accused of not appearing eloquent to European judges, it might be justly represented, that the eastern eloquence dif-

[1] 2 Thes. i. 8.

fers widely from the western. In those purer climates, where learning, that is here but a denizen, was a native, the most cherished and admired composures of their wits, if judged by western rules of oratory, will be judged destitute of it. Their dark and involved sentences, their figurative and parabolical discourses, their abrupt and maimed way of expressing themselves, which often leaves much place to guesses at the sense, and their neglect of connecting transitions, which often leaves us at a loss for the method and coherency of what they write, are qualities that our rhetoricians do not more generally dislike than theirs practise; there being perhaps little less disparity in our opinions than in our ways of writing; for their pens (as if it were a presage of the different changes the Jews and Greeks have made in point of religion) move from the right hand towards the left; ours (therein imitated by those of the Ethiopians) from the left towards the right; so that we think they write backwards, and they, that we do so. Of this difference of the notions, that the eastern and western colonies of the sons of Adam have harboured concerning eloquence, I shall need to mention but one instance, that one is so remarkable; and that is the Alcoran. How much the Mahometan world boasts the eloquence of that book, can scarce be unknown to those that have, though but a little, busied their curiosity in that sort of enquiries. The ablest Arabian expositors and other authors tells us, that all the wit and art of men and demons, would be unable to hinder that book from being matchless.[1] Mahomet

[1] Beidavi, Ahmedibn, Edris, and others.

himself was so proud of it, that in some passages in it, he defies its opposers to equal one surat or section of it, and seems to make its peerlessness an argument of its not being of barely human authority;[1] and the Saracens, pressed with their religion's being destitute of attesting miracles, will not scruple to reply, that, though there were no other miracle to manifest the excellency of their religion above that taught by the prophets, yet the Alcoran itself were sufficient, as being a lasting miracle that transcends all other miracles.[2] How charming its eloquence may be in its original I confess myself too unskilful in the Arabic tongue to be a competent judge; my other studies and distractions having made me forget most of the little knowledge I had once acquired of that flourishing language. But though the Alcoran have stolen too much from the Bible not to contain divers excellent things, which is one inducement to me to cite it the oftener, yet certainly, not only the ancient Latin version of it, made by orders of the abbot Petrus Cluniacensis, and published in the last age, by the procurement of Bibliander, (and of which this is the grand critic Scaliger's exclamation, *Deum immortalem, quam inepta est vulgaris illa, quam habemus, interpretatio?*[3]) would scarce, by our European orators, be thought so much as of kin to eloquent; but the recent translations I have seen

[1] S. Surat. x. S. 11, and S. 17.

[2] —— Etsi nihil præter solum Alkoranum (adduxisset) satis hoc foret ad eximiam excellentiam supra reliqua, quæ prophetæ adduxerunt: nam ille miraculum est, quod in secula durat præ omnibus aliis miraculis. H. Hotting. Hist. Orient. pagina circiter 300.

[3] J. Scaliger Epist. 362; apud Theod. Hackspan in libro cui Titulus, Fides et Leges Mohamædis, p. 2.

of it in French, and, as to divers of it in Latin, elaborated by great scholars, and accurate Arabicians, by making it very conformable to its eastern original, have not so rendered it, but that persons that judge of rhetoric by the rules of it current in these western parts of the world, would, instead of extolling it for the superlative, not allow it the positive degree of eloquence; would think the style as destitute of graces, as the theology of truth; and would possibly as much admire the Saracen's admiration as they do the book. And not only what I have seen of the eminent East-Indians, is strangely incongruous to our notions of eloquence, but what I have perused of the famous *literati* (as they call the learned men) of China, though written with great care by the authors, and, as it seems, translated with no less by the knowing interpreters, would, to an ordinary European orator, appear rather ridiculous than eloquent. But to content ourselves with the examples we formerly selected out of the less remote parts of the east; since Mahomet, whose eloquence, almost as prosperous as his sword, was able to bring credit and proselytes even to such a religion as his; since Moses, that so celebrated legislator, bred up in the refining court and all the famed wisdom of the Egyptians; since Solomon, who had such incommunicable advantages to improve himself, and whose wisdom (esteemed capable to have governed more kingdoms than his had subjects) the western world hath for so many ages admired, and the eastern only not idolized; and since the prophet Daniel, whose promising youth was not only cultivated by the instructions of the Chaldean sages, but enjoyed the diviner tutorage of God's

Spirit; and whose matchless abilities preferred him from a captive, to be the chief as well of the Chaldean wise men as the Median princes: since these applauded writers, I say, whom the eastern nations so much and so justly admired, by many of our Latinists are not thought good writers, because of our differing notions of eloquence; nay, if amongst Europeans themselves, Cicero hath found many censurers, and a book hath been published to prove that Tully was not eloquent, may not we rationally enough suppose, that the Grecian and Roman style amongst the eastern writers may not be much better relished than theirs is amongst us; and that, consequently, in those parts of the Scripture whose eloquence is not obvious to us Europeans, the pretended want of eloquence may be but a differing and eastern kind of it? Especially if we consider that the ancientest writers in prose now extant amongst us, were scarce contemporary to the latest writers of the Old Testament; and yet that eloquence, the dress of our thoughts, like the dress of our bodies, differs not only in several regions, but in several ages. And oftentimes in that, as in attire, what was lately fashionable is now ridiculous, and what now makes a man look like a courtier, may within these few lustres make him look like an antic: though how purely it is the mode that makes such things appear handsome or deformed, may be readily collected from the vicissitudes observable in modes; men by intervals relapsing into obsolete fashions. That there are great changes in that mode of writing men commonly mistake for eloquence, I shall produce no less illustrious a witness than Seneca, who in his hundred and fourteenth epistle, (to

omit other passages in his works,) not only proves it at large, but shows that in some ages, even the faulty ways of expression, conspired in by the wits of those times, have passed for eloquence. The Scripture style, then, though it were not eloquent now, may have excellently suited the genius of those times its several books were written in; and have been very proper for those people it was primarily designed to work upon. And if I would presume to be paradoxical in a thing I so little pretend skill in as eloquence, I might further represent on this occasion, that rhetoric being but an organical or instrumental art, in order chiefly to persuasion, or delight, its rules ought to be estimated by their tendency and commensurateness to its end, and consequently are to be conformed to by a wise man, but so far forth as he judgeth them seasonable and proper to please or to persuade; which, when he sees he can do better by declining them than by practising them, as orators, like hunters, must oftentimes leave the most beaten paths, if they will not lose their game, he should not scruple to prefer the end to the means, the scope of the artist to what the schools are pleased to call the scope of the art, and to think it more eligible to speak powerfully than to speak regularly. And we may hence consider, that it may be somewhat inconsiderate to judge of all eloquence by the rules of it that Cicero's admirers impose on us, and confound their systems of precepts with the art of rhetoric, as if they were equivalent or of the same extent. For Cicero being reputed, and that deservedly, an eloquent man, and very successful in persuading his thus and thus qualified hearers, divers whose modesty or despair kept them from aspiring

to more than imitation, observing that Tully often made use of such and such a contrivance, and such and such figurative forms of speaking, took the pains to reduce those observations into rules, which being highly applauded by their successors, and by them recruited with some resembling rules drawn from the practice of a few other orators, were afterwards compiled into an art, which as I deny not to be a great help to the imitation of Tully and Demosthenes, or those others from whose structure and fashions of speech such institutions have been drawn, so I shall no more take it for a complete system of rhetoric than any instructions deducible from the journals of Solomon's Tarshish fleets, and from the Grecian and Romans' sea-voyages, for the true and entire art of navigation. For if other persons, either by an endowment or improvement of nature, can find other equally or more happy and powerful or moving, though never so differing, ways of expressing themselves, they ought as little to be confined by the prescriptions acquiesced in before them, as Columbus thought himself obliged to be by the rules or practice of ancient navigators, whose methods and voyages, had he not boldly ventured to vary from and pass beyond, how vast and rich a portion of the world had his conformity left undiscovered! And on this occasion, Theophilus, I must mention one thing that I have observed, which perhaps you will not think either despicable or impertinent; and it is, that though the people of China be esteemed the most numerous, the most flourishing, and, very few if any excepted, the most civilized nation in the world, though amongst them the greatest part of preferments be attainable by verbal learning, and though they have books

in their language, how well written I know not, having never read any of them, of almost all kind of liberal arts and sciences; yet I find by the late traveller in China that writ the Italian history of that kingdom, and by other authors that mention their literature, that this populous and ingenious nation, that has been so long settled in a flourishing condition, and more than any other people allows encouragements and recompences to learned men, has not cared to receive rhetoric into the number of their arts and sciences; presuming, as one may guess, that the confining men's expressions to established rules would not be so likely to enable those to express themselves eloquently, that nature has indisposed to do so, as to hinder others from expressing themselves, as well as were they left to their full liberty they would do. I will not say, nevertheless, that our strict Ciceronian rules are crutches that may be helps to weak or lame fancies, but are clogs or burdens to sound and active ones: but this I observe, that these Utopian laws of oratory are seldom rigorously imposed by any that publish other books that may be examined by them: and that wise men, as well in the west as in the east, will not easily lose good thoughts or good expressions, because they are not reducible to them. And this I the rather press, because I have found but too many so blindly servile as to imitate without discretion or reserve, in applauded authors, as well the bad as the good; create such artist's errors, rules of art; and make one man's particular fancies, or perhaps failings, confining laws to others, and convey them as such to their succeeders, who are afterwards bold to missname all unobsequiousness to their incogitancy, presumption; as Seneca tells

us of divers imperfections of style, which being familiar to some one who at that time hath the vogue for eloquence, are upon his score copied by his imitators, and by them taught to others;[1] as, (says he) when Sallust flourished, his style made maimed and abrupt sentences, words surprisingly misplaced, and an obscure brevity pass for ornaments: and indeed, it is not uneasy for any man to observe the very weeds of cried up rhetoricians, cried up for flowers of rhetoric. But having already wandered, perhaps, too far in this digression, I shall now conclude it; though since it is for the Scripture, and with its enemies that I am contending, I shall venture to do it with minding our cardinal, and those that so undervalue the Scripture's ways of expression in comparison of Tully's, because his books do so regularly express the rules of eloquence; that it is no marvel they should find Cicero's writings to be so conformable to their laws of art, whilst they frame those laws of art out of his writings.

But, Theophilus, I fear I have detained you too long in a digression whereinto I slipped but occasionally, which is not so necessary to my present argument, but that I am content you should look upon the paradox as any thing rather than an opinion or reasoning whereon I lay any great stress.

In the fourth place then, let me represent to you, that there are very few, if any, books in the world, that are no more voluminous, in which there is greater plenty of figurative expressions than in the

[1] —— Hæc vitia unus aliquis inducit, sub quo tunc eloquentia est: cæteri imitantur, et alter alteri tradunt. Sic Sallustio vigente, amputatæ sententiæ, et verba ante exspectatum cadentia, et obscura brevitas, fuere procultu. Seneca. Epist. cxiv.

Bible. Though this may seem strange, it is no more than may be made good by more than some hundreds of instances; there being few tropes or figures in rhetoric of which numerous examples are not collectible out of the expressions of holy writ. I insist not upon this, because a bare catalogue of the rhetorical passages I could enumerate would too much swell an essay; and I am informed that task hath been already prosperously undertaken by abler pens. Wherefore I shall now only say, that the eloquence of the Scripture hath been highly celebrated by no small number of persons, highly celebrated for eloquence; and that many, who thought themselves as intelligent in oratory as those that censure the Scripture, have suspected their own eloquence of insufficiency worthily to extol that of the prophet Isaiah; and some of them, (amongst whom I cannot but name that excellent prince of Mirandula, whom even the greatest rabbi of this age[1] styles the phœnix of his age,) who after having unsatisfiedly travelled through all sorts of human volumes, have rested and acquiesced only in these divine ones: which will not a little recommend the Scripture, since we may apply to books what an excellent poet says of mistresses,

> "'Tis not that which first we love,
> But what dying we approve,"[2]

that we express the highest value of. And indeed, the best artists making two parts of oratory; the one which consists in the embellishments of our conceptions, and the other that consists in the congruity of them to our design and

[1] Menasse Ben-Israel. [2] Waller.

method, and the suitable accommodation of the to the various circumstances considerable in the matter, the speaker, and the hearers; this latter is peculiarly and inimitably practised in the Scripture; and as much of the former (which is not only less considerable, but is changeable and unagreed of, as we have newly seen) is made use of as is requisite to the author's purposes, and to manifest that delicacy or smoothness never ceases to be the property of his style, but because in some cases it would be incongruous to his design. And where these verbal ornaments are spared, they are not missed; for as there are some bodies so well shaped and fashioned that any clothes become them much better than the most fine and graceful would do ordinary, much more crooked or mishapen, persons; so there are writings whose matter and structure are such, that the plainest language can scarce misbecome them so as to hinder them from eclipsing a trifling or ill-matched subject, with the sprucest and gaudiest expressions that can be lavished on it. But the truth is, that this florid eloquence is great in many texts, where it is not at all conspicuous, being hidden in the matter, as in roses of diamonds, the jewels often times keep us from minding the flower and the enamel, and appears not great, but because it is not the greatest. Some famous writers have challenged Demosthenes and Cicero to compare with the prophet Isaiah, in whom they have not only admired that lofty strain which artists have termed the sublime character, but even that harmonious disposition and sound of words, I mean in their original, which the French prettily call '*La cadence des periodes.*'

Wherefore, Theophilus, whereas I have formerly

acknowledged that there are some witty men that speak very disrespectfully of the Scripture, I hope that if you meet with any such, you will consider, that it has, among the wits, as well celebrators and admirers as disregarders. And that you may think this desire of mine the more reasonable, be pleased to consider with me, that there are divers things which ought to lessen the authority of the disparagers of the Scripture, in the case under consideration.

For first, how few of them, think you, are wont to read it in its originals, and how much less a number is there of those who both know and duly consider all those particulars represented in the past discourse on the behalf of the Scripture's style! So that in a great many men of parts, their undervaluation of the Scripture proceeds not from their having great wits, but from their not having a competent information of what can be alleged for its justification.

But though we should suppose those we speak of not to want information, yet we may well suppose many of them not to be free from vanity and envy, there scarce being any fault so incident to great wits as the ambition of being thought still more and more so, and the unwillingness that any composures but their own, or those they have a hand in, should be celebrated: as if all praises were injurious to them that are given to any other. It need be no great wonder then if so excellent a book as the Scripture, have as well enviers as admirers; and if there be divers who cavil at it and seem to undervalue it, out of a criminal fondness of the over-ambitioned title of a wit, which they hope to acquire by unherding and keeping

out of the road, and owning their being able to slight and disgrace that which so many others reverence and venerate.

But, thirdly, it is sufficiently notorious, that of the opposers of the Scripture, there is a great part whose vanity and envy, though no small faults, are not their greatest crimes; but who live so dissolutely and scandalously that the suspicion cannot but be obvious, that such decry the Scripture for fear of being obliged, at least, for mere shame, to live more conformably to it. And that it were no slander to affirm it to be their interest, not their reason, that makes them find fault with a book that finds so much fault with them; and they who are sensible of the truth of that of our Saviour, where he says, 'That many love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil:' and that 'he that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved,'[1] will not be much moved to find conscious malefactors find fault with the statute-book, but will rather look upon these sinners' censures of the Scripture as apologies they judge necessary to palliate their sins, or as acts of revenge, for their being exposed in all their deformity to the eyes of the world, and of their own consciences, in the Bible; and consequently will be inclined to think that their irreligious expressions do rather show what they would have men believe of them, than what they believe of the Scripture, by seeming to slight which they hope to have their vices imputed rather to a superiority of their reason over that of others, than a servitude of their reason to their passions.

[1] John, 19, 20.

A long Digression against Profaneness, as it relates to the Scripture.

Here I thought to pass on to another argument, but, to express myself in David's words, 'while I was musing, the fire burned,'[1] and my zeal for the Scripture, together with the charity it has taught me to exercise even towards its opposers, suffers me not, with either silence or languid resentments, to see how much that incomparable book loses of the opinion of less discerning men, upon the account of their disrespects, who are, whether deservedly or not, looked upon as wits. And therefore to what I have represented to invalidate the authority of those few persons, otherwise truly witty, that undervalue the Scripture, I am obliged to add, that besides them there is a number of those that slight the Scripture, who are but looked upon as wits, without being such indeed: nay, who many of them would not be so much as mistaken for such, but for the boldness they take to own slighting of the Scripture and to abuse the words of it to irreligious senses, and perhaps passing to the impudence of perverting inspired expressions, to deliver obscene thoughts. But to knowing and serious men, this prevaricating with the Scripture will neither discredit *it* nor much recommend the profane *prevaricator;* for a book's being capable of being so misused, is too unavoidable to be a disparagement to it. Nor will any intelligent reader undervalue the charming poems of Virgil or of Ovid, because by shuffling and disguising the expressions, some French writers have

[1] Psal. xxxix. 3.

of late been pleased out of rare pieces to compose whole books of what they call *vers burlesques*, designed by their ridiculousness to make their readers sport; and on the other side, to abuse dismembered words and passages of any author to meanings he never dreamed of, is a thing so easy that almost any man may have the wit to talk at that profane rate, that will but allow himself the sauciness to do so. And indeed experience shows, that if this vice itself do not make its practisers suspected of being necessitous of the quality they put it on to be thought masters of, yet at least persons intelligent and pious, will not be apt to value any discourse as truly witty, that cannot please the fancy without offending the conscience, and will never admire his plenty that cannot make an entertainment, without furnishing out the table with unclean meats; and considering persons will scarce think it a demonstration of a man's being a wit, that he will venture to be damned to be thought one. And that which aggravates these men's profaneness, and leaves them excuseless in it, is, that there are few of these 'fools' (for so the wise man calls them that make a mock of sin) that 'have said in their hearts that there is no God;'[1] or that the Scripture is not his word; their disrespect to the Scripture springing from their vanity, not their incredulity. They affect singularity for want of any thing else that is singular; and finding in themselves strong desires of conspicuousness with small abilities to attain it, they are resolved, with Erostratus, that fired Diana's temple to be talked of for having done so, to acquire that considerableness

[1] Psal. xiv. 1.

by their sacrilege, which they must despair of from their parts. And indeed there want not many who have so little wit as to cry up all this sort of people for great wits. And as withes, whilst they are sound, grow unregarded trees; but when they once are rotten, shine in the night; so many of these pretenders, whilst they were not very profane, were, and that justly, esteemed very dull; but now that their parts are absolutely corrupted and perverted, they grow conspicuous, only because they are grown depraved. And I shall make bold to continue the comparison a little further, and observe, that as this rotten wood shines but in the night; so many of these pretenders pass for wits but amongst them that are not truly so. For persons really knowing, can easily distinguish betwixt that which exacts the title of wit from our judgments, and that which but appears such to our corruptions. And how often the discourse we censure is of the latter sort, they need not be informed that have observed how many will talk very acceptably in derogation of religion, whom, upon other subjects, their partiallest friends acknowledge very dull; and who are taken notice of for persons that seldom say any thing well but what it is ill to say. And questionless there is no small number of these scorners, whose censures of the Scripture's style are little less guilty of presumption than profaneness. I have of late years met with divers such vain pretenders, who blush not to talk of rhetoric more magisterially than Aristotle or Tully would; and superciliously to deride, in comparison of their own writings and theirs who write like them, not the Bible only, but the most venerated authors of antiquity; and,

to use Asaph's words, 'They speak loftily, they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth;'[1] they speak arrogantly and censoriously both of God and men; whilst themselves oftentimes understand no tongue but their mother's, and are strangers enough to rhetoric, not to know the difference betwixt a trope and a figure, betwixt a prosopopœia and a metaphor, or betwixt a climax and a metonymy. Nor is our wonder like to cease, to find these transcendent wits (as they are pleased to think themselves) so undervalue the Scripture, by considering the rare composures they despise it for; these being commonly no other than some drunken song or paltry epigram, some fawning love-letter, or some such other flashy trifle, that doth much more argue a depressed soul than an elevated fancy. Some of these gallants, by their tavern-songs, use the muses like anchovies, only to entice men to drink. Another, with more solemnity and applause, makes the muses (what the French call) the confidants of his amours, prostitutes his wit to evince and celebrate the defeat of his reason, and never considering how apt self-love makes us to magnify any thing that magnifies us, is proud to have wit ascribed him by as bribed as incompetent judges of it; and takes it for as high a proof as desirable a fruit of eloquence, to persuade a vain mistress that she is handsome and adored, to whom it were eloquence indeed to be able to persuade the contrary. Divers of the Jews are wont to mention the names of deceased sinners with that brand taken out of the Proverbs, 'May the name

[1] Psalm lxxiii. 8, 9.

of the wicked rot;' but as the filthiest swine after their death are salted, and the gammons made of their flesh are served in, all stuck with bays; so divers that have lived notorious epicures, have too often, after their death, not only their names salted (not to say embalmed) with flattering epitaphs, and, I wish, seldomer, as flattering funeral sermons; but have their drunken or lustful rhymes extolled with such eulogies by their surviving resemblers, that not only good Christians but good poets cannot but grieve and blush, thus to see bays, that should be appropriated to and crown that heavenly gift called poetry, when, mindful of its dignity and extraction, it endears to us by our fancies, truths that should have an influence on our affections, (by clothing excellent thoughts in suitable and winning dresses,) prostituted and degraded to make wreaths for those who have no better title to them than a few sensual rhymes, where the dictates of Horace are as little conformed to as the example of David; and the laws of art little less violated than those of religion. It is pleasant to observe in how many of such copies of verses the themes appear to have been made to the conceits, not the conceits for the themes; how often the words are not so properly the clothes of the matter, as the matter the stuffing of the words; how frequently sublime nonsense passes for sublime wit; and (though, according to my notion of it, that is indeed true wit which it is more easy to understand than it is not to admire it) how commonly confused notions, and abortive or unlicked conceptions are, in exotic language or ambiguous expressions, exposed to the uncertain adoption of the courteous reader; which the writers are

emboldened to expect favourable, by finding men once thought (whether deservedly or otherwise) lofty wits, to have so often the luck of parrots and of those that talk in their sleep, who are not seldom understood by others when they do not understand themselves. And very much of kin to their verses is their prose. For though I am far from denying that those that have store of wit, may express some of it in an address to a great man, or in writing to a mistress; yet as for such profane persons I am now speaking of, who rather would be thought wits than are so, it is easy to discern that very many of their almost as much flattered as flattering letters of love and compliment, are but prologues to, and paraphrases of the subscription, "your humble servant." Though love be universally thought to make the fancy soar, (lovers like sealed pigeons, flying the higher for having been blinded,) and though even the wiser observe, that, like war which is wont as well to raise soldiers of fortune as to ruin men of fortune, love warms and elevates lesser wits, though it too often infatuate the great ones; yet a witty lady did not scruple to say frequently, that give her but leave to bar half a score words, such as she pleased to name; and she would undertake to spoil all the fine letters of our amorous gallants. I applaud not the severity of this lady; and think her challenge relishes as much of vanity as skill; but yet, to express the sense of these few words, "I desire you should think I can write well, am a civil person, and your humble servant," being the drift and substance of most of these ceremonial papers; these (oftentimes as tedious as servile) amplificators, with all their empty multiplicity of fine words, do but, like market-people, pay a piece in

twenty shillings. In wits not blessed with solid reason and learning, (that is, in most readers,) fancy being the predominant faculty, makes them relish those writings most where fancy unrivalled reigns. And therefore, though I dare not say that it requires no great parts for those to write high and acceptable compliments, that think nothing fit to be endeavoured in compliments, but to make them acceptable by making them high enough; (flattery and profaneness seeming in such composures what spots are in leopards, blemishes that make a great part of their beauty;) or for a flatterer to persuade those vain persons that will readily believe a man, even when he doth not believe himself; yet sure it gives much latitude and liberty to a writer, not to be obliged to believe what he says, nor say but what he thinks either will be or ought to be believed. And truly, they that exercise their pens on either sort of themes (I mean those that require only new or pleasing fancies and smooth language; and those that require learning and knowledge pertinently and handsomely expressed) do, I doubt not, find it much less difficult for writers to delight, where they propose themselves no higher end, and scruple at nothing they judge conducive to that inferior one, than to please, where to do so is but a subordinate end, which men allow not themselves even the use of all proper means to attain; nor do I question but such persons find it far more easy to write acceptably on subjects where they are not tied to speak either reason or truth, than to write well on a theme where men are confined to write nothing but what they judge useful, and what they can make good; as considering that they may be called to account by men for what

they publish, if not by God, both for their own time and that of their readers. And, indeed, when I compare the most applauded trifles of these undervaluers of the Scripture style, with the celebrating discourses of it extant in the learned writings of St. Austin, St. Jerome, Tertullian, Lactantius, Chrysostom, Mirandula, and others, whose penetrant and powerful arguments defeat not God's enemies, as Samson did the Philistines with a jawbone of an ass,[1] nor as Shamgar with an ox-goad[2] (I mean with blunt and despicable weapons,) but as Elias did, with fire from heaven;[3] and whose apologetical defences of the spiritual Jerusalem are glittering and solid, as the wall of the heavenly Jerusalem is described to be of jasper, and the foundations of the wall garnished with all manner of precious stones:[4] when I compare, I say, the composures of our frothy censurers with those of the sacred orators; methinks I discern such a difference betwixt them, as I have observed betwixt those justly admired statues I have seen in the Capitol, and the larger sort of babies that we find in the Exchange: for the former, besides their vastness, are so recommended by the worth and permanency of their matter, the excellency of the workmanship, and the nobleness of what they represent, that they are most prized by the best artists, and time is not only unable to consume them, but still increases men's value of them; whereas the latter are little trifles, scarce welcome to any but children in understanding; and admired only for a gaudy effeminate dress, which

[1] Judges, xv. 15. [2] Ibid. iii. 31. [3] 2 Kings, i. 10.
[4] Rev. xxi. 10, 18, 19.

will quickly either be sullied or worn out; and a fashionableness which within a short while will perhaps be ridiculous. But, supposing at length that the profane aspirer should be so lucky, or so successful, (for happy I cannot think it,) as to attain the so criminally courted notedness, yet will he have no great cause to boast the purchase, when he seriously considers, that the devil, who seduces other sinners like men with current coin or sparkling jewels, (something that either advantages their interests or delights their senses,) hath inveigled him, like a child, with a whistle; a trifle that only pleases with a transient and empty sound; and, that fame is a blessing only in relation to the qualities and the persons that give it: since otherwise, the tormented prince of devils himself were as happy as he is miserable; and famousness unattended with endearing causes is a quality so undesirable, that even infamy and folly can confer it. As Momus is little less talked of than Homer; the unjust Pilate is more famous than Aristides the Just; and Barabbas's name is signally recorded in Scripture, whereas the penitent thief is left unmentioned. And sure the highest favours that applause can impart, and the being (though never so loudly) cried up for a wit, will hardly so repair the punishment of profaneness, but that its wretched sufferer will find but small satisfaction in having his name celebrated in other books, whilst it is blotted out of that of life. And as for those (you know whom I mean) that aspiring to posthumous glory, endeavour to acquire it by irreligious writings, destinated not to see the light till their authors be gone to the region of darkness, I cannot but admire to see an ambition that projects beyond the grave, stop short of

heaven; and cannot but think those wits the greatest fools, who to tempt praises they shall never hear, provide themselves torments that they shall ever feel. For, though profaneness by those that are guilty of it be too often thought but a small sin, because they look upon it but as a verbal one, yet I could easily represent it under another notion, if I would here repeat what I have discoursed touching indulgence to reputedly small and verbal sins in another paper, from which, though I will not now transcribe any thing, yet I cannot but wish it were well considered how affronting speeches concerning God's word are like to be looked upon in that great day, when (to borrow St. Jude's terms) 'the Lord shall come with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them,' not only 'of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed;' but also 'of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'[1] And, indeed, these presumed peccadillos, though oftentimes in health and prosperity, they appear not to us to blemish much our consciences, yet, when in our distresses or at the approaches of death, God comes, as the prophet speaks, to 'search men's hearts as it were with candles, and punish the men that are settled upon their lees,'[2] (which whilst a liquor is, it may look clear, and be taken for defecated, but a little agitation of the vessel strait makes it troubled and muddy,) they appear in a terrifying form. For as paper written upon with juice of lemons may wear white (the livery of innocence) whilst it is kept from the fire, but

[1] Jude, ver. 14, 15. [2] Zeph. i. 12.

being held to it, black lines do presently appear; so out of many consciences that seem clear in prosperity, the fire of adversity draws out the latent blacknesses, and makes us read things undiscerned there before. And questionless, if, as the Scripture informs us, there are sins whose cry is able to reach heaven,[1] so loud a crime as the profaneness I am now speaking of, is likely to do more than whisper there; especially since it is much to be feared, that many of these scoffers (as they seem to be called in the Scripture, which they bear witness to, by cavilling at it) do 'rebel against the light,' and 'kick against the pricks'[2] of their own consciences; such a crime, I say, will be so far from whispering in heaven, that it will rather give an alarm that will rouse up provoked justice; whose inflictions, like stones tumbled down from the towers of an assaulted place, the longer they are in falling on men, the more fatally they oppress them; in which regard, perhaps, the feet of our Saviour in the Apocalypse are described to be like unto fine brass, as if they burned or glowed in a furnace;[3] to intimate, that though he be very slow in his march to destroy the wicked, yet he is as sure, when once he pleases to tread them under foot, to crush and consume them. If there be no injury that more exasperates than contempt, and no contempt that more provokes than that which offends directly and immediately, (the affronters thereby proclaiming that they are neither ashamed nor afraid of angering,) how provoking may we think that crime which makes God the subject of our derision; and that

[1] Gen. xviii. 21. [2] 2 Pet. iii. 3; Jude, ver. 17, 18.
[3] Rev. i. 15.

with so little circuition, as to abuse that word which he so solemnly declared his mind by to mankind! Plutarch, to manifest how much some idolaters did more incense the Deity than some atheists, tells us, he should esteem himself less injured by the man that should doubt or deny that there was ever any such man as Plutarch; than by him that should affirm that there was such a one indeed, but that he was an old fellow, that used, like the poet's Saturn, to devour his children; and was guilty of those other crimes imputed by the heathen to their gods. Upon a like account we may esteem God less provoked by their unbelief that doubt or reject the Scripture, than by their profaneness that make so sacrilegiously bold with it; since the latter impute to God the enditing of what they endeavour to make men think fit to have sport made with. This of profaneness is so empty and unprofitable a sin, that it scarce gets the practiser any thing but an ill name amongst good men upon earth, and a worse place amongst bad men in hell; by making his enmity to piety so malicious and so disinterested, that he will endeavour to do religion harm, though it be to do himself no good. He is such a volunteer sinner, that he hath neither the wit nor the excuse of declining his conscience in compliment to his senses; and though he ever makes but an ill bargain that gets in hell to boot; yet those I would reclaim, come far short of the comparative wisdom of their folly, who to gain so considerable (though yet over-purchased) a possession as the whole world, should part with their own souls. And sure a sin that is injurious to God's glory, and is apt to subvert (what he and good men prize next) the dearly purchased, immortal, and invalu-

able souls of men; and to 'destroy them for whom Christ died;'[1] will not, by being verbal, be protected from being heinous; and to those that practise it, I shall recommend the latter half of the epistle of Jude; which, though it seem properly to relate to the Gnostics or Carpocratians of his time, will deserve a trembling attention from those that revive the sins there condemned in ours; and who would do well, by seasonably considering the fate there threatened to their predecessors, to tremble at their crime. But for fear of losing it, I shall not spend more time in endeavouring to disabuse our scorners; whom I should have left to the quiet enjoyment of their unenvied self-admiration, had not their despising the Scripture upon a presumption of their own matchless wit, (like Jeroboam that forsook that incomparable structure, the temple, where God did so gloriously and peculiarly manifest himself to men, to worship calves of his own making,[2]) engaged me, in conformity to the wise man's counsel in such cases, to 'answer the fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit:'[3] for my reproofs are addressed to those called wits, but as they are traducers or undervaluers of the Scripture; not as they either pretend to, or enjoy a quality which I have the justice to esteem, though not the happiness to possess; and which my value for it, and my charity for men, makes me troubled to see arrogated by many that want it; and by too many that have it, prostituted to gratify other people's pride, or their own lusts.

[1] 1 Romans, xv. 15. [2] 1 Kings, xii. 28, 32.
[3] Proverbs, xxvi. 5.

An Appendix to the former Digression, inviting one sort of witty men to make amends for the profaneness of another.

How much happier were it for persons of choice parts to employ them, as Bezaleel and Aholiab did theirs, in working for the sanctuary; in asserting and embellishing divinity! The structure will not alone deserve the skilfullest hand; but though it reject not goats' hair, and coloured badgers' skins, will admit not only purple and fine twined linen, but gold, silver, and precious stones:[1] the richest ornaments that learning and eloquence can grace theology with, being not only merited by that heavenly subject, but being applicable to it, as much to their own advantage as to that of their theme. We see how ambitious are men to leave a good name behind them, and appear in the habit of virtue to their own and after times. Witness the artifices and hypocrisy men generally veil or disguise their sins with, and the flattering epitaphs with which so many vicious persons endeavour to convey themselves to the opinion of posterity. Now, they that write piously as well as handsomely, have the advantage of getting themselves the reputation as well of virtuous as of able men; and besides that double recompence, may expect a third, transcending both, in heaven, where they that, in the true Scripture sense, be 'wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.'[2] It is the general complaint and grief of persons truly zealous, that

[1] Exod. xxiii. 3, 4, 5, &c. [2] Dan. xii. 3.

there are many more wits and grandees now-a-days, who, by perverting God's gifts to the service of idols (of pride or pleasure) of their own setting up, resemble the degenerate Jewish church, of whom God complains by Hosea, that 'she did not know that he gave her the corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and her gold which they prepared for Baal;'[1] than that, by an humble dedication of their choicest abilities to God's service, imitate holy David and his princes; who, having consecrated their gold and silver and precious stones, towards the enriching and embellishing of the temple, perfumed that vast offering with this acknowledgment to God; 'All things come of thee, and thine own have we given thee.'[2] But though now I know divers great persons and great wits amongst us, who, very unmindful of that text, 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive?'[3] like those ungrateful clouds that obscure the sun that raised them, oppose the glory of that God who elevated them to that height; yet I do not absolutely despair, that as God hath been pleased to make use of several royal pens for the tracing of his word, and to make a person learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians his first secretary; so he will one day engage both the grandees and the wits to strive to expiate, by their devotion and service to the Scripture, the injuries that irreligious parts and greatness have done it. I will not tell you, Theophilus, that an early study of religion would gain to its party most of those many wits that will be sure to contend for whatever opinion is expressed by the wittiest things

[1] Hosea, ii. 8. [2] 1 Chron. xxix. 14. [3] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

they can say. But I will tell you, that a particular consideration that makes me wish to see witty writers more generally employ their pens on the behalf of religion, is, that the services they do it endear it to them; for as Macchiavel smartly observes, and as the love of parents and nurses to children may evince; *La natura degli huomini è cosi obligarsi per i benefici che si fanno, come per quelli che si ricevono.*[1] "It is natural to men to be as well engaged by the kindnesses they do as by those they receive." And for the encouragement of the possessors of great parts to employ them on religious themes, such as the Holy Scripture, I shall represent to them, that even that immortality of name which worldly writers, for the most part, solely aim at, is not by pious writers less found for being last sought: their theme contracts not their fame by a true diminution, but only by comparison to a greater good: their looking upon their own glory but as an accession to God's, not hindering others from praising that wit and eloquence they praise God with; as beauty makes itself admirers, though in vestals; and a rare voice may ravish us with a psalm; or as the jewels that adorned it, shone with their wonted lustre on Aaron's breast-plate. Yes, 'as godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;'[2] and as the 'hundred-fold now in this time,' is very consistent with the 'eternal life in the world to come;'[3] so is it very possible for the same pious writer to have his name written, at once in

[1] Nicholo Macchiavelli, nel libro del principe, c. 10.
[2] 1 Tim. iv. 8. [3] Mark, x. 30.

both those immortal books of life and fame; and, like the inspired poet, holy David, wear as well here a crown of laurel, as hereafter, τον ἀμαράντινον τῆς δόξης στέφανον, that unfading crown of glory St. Peter speaks of.[1] And though we are too generally now-a-days, grown so sinful, that we scarce relish any composure that endeavours to reclaim us from being so; yet less licentious and more discerning times, which may be, perhaps, approaching, will repair the omissions and fastidiousness of the present, by an eminent gratitude to the names of those that have laboured to transmit to others, in the handsomest dress they durst give them, the truths themselves most valued. And I observe, that though Solomon himself delivered so many thousand songs and proverbs, and the nature of beasts, birds, reptiles, and fishes, together with the history of plants from the 'cedar of Lebanon, even to the hysop that springeth out of the wall;'[2] yet those three only treatises, designed peculiarly for the instruction of the church, survive their lost companions. And, as anciently the manna which the Israelites gathered to employ in their domestic uses, lasted not unputrefied above a day or two; but that which they laid up in the sanctuary, to perpetuate or secure God's glory, continued whole ages uncorrupted;[3] so the books written to serve our private turns of interest or fame, are oftentimes short-lived; when those consecrated to God's honour are, for that end's sake, vouchsafed a lastingness and kept from perishing. And those many dull and uneloquent glosses and expositions

[1] Pet. v. 4. [2] 1 Kings, iv. 31, 32, 33.
[3] Exod. xvi. 20, 33, 34.

of the ancient Jews, that the merit of their theme hath preserved for so many ages, may assure us, that the Scripture doth often make their names and writings that illustrate it, partakers of its own prerogative of immortality. Not to mention that (according to that of the Psalmist, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers; because thy testimonies are my meditation,'[1]) such an employment of parts doth oftentimes invite God to increase them; as he that had most talents committed to him, for improving them to his Lord's service, was trusted with more of them;[2] and he who employed some few cups of his wine to entertain our Saviour, had whole vessels of his water turned into better wine.[3] Certainly, transcendent wits, when once they addict themselves to theological composures, improve and grace most excellently themes so capable of being so improved. They need small time to signalize their pens; for possessing already in a sublime degree all the requisites and appropriates of rate writers, they need but apply that choice knowledge and charming eloquence to divine subjects, to handle them to admiration; as Hiram successfully used the skill he had learned in Tyre, in the building and adorning of God's temple;[4] and Jephthah victoriously employed the military gallantry and art that had made him considerable in the land of Tob, in defending the cause, and defeating the enemies of God.[5] Of this truth the primitive times afford us numerous and noble instances; but especially that stupendous wit St. Austin, (whom I dare oppose

[1] Psalm cxix. 99. [2] Matt. xxv. 28. [3] John, ii. 1—10.
[4] 1 Kings, vii. 13, 14, &c. [5] Judges, xi.

to any of the wits that have dared to oppose the Scripture,) the production of whose wit in his unregenerate state, and after his conversion to the Catholic faith and piety, oblige me to resemble him to Aaron's rod, which, supposing the truth of their opinion that think it to be the same that Moses used, whilst it was employed abroad, did indeed for a while work wonders, that made it much admired; but when once it came to be laid up in the tabernacle, unconfined to the usual laws of other plants, it shot forth and afforded permanent fruit in a night.[1] But, Theophilus, to recover myself at length from my over-prolix digression, I must remember, that it was objected, that as well divers great princes and great statesmen, as many great wits disesteem, or at least neglect, the Scripture; and, indeed, though I am sorry it cannot, yet it must not be denied, that notwithstanding all the prerogatives of the Bible, there needs not much acquaintance with great men, to show many of them, that though they deny not God to be the author, deny themselves the blessing of being readers of it: some out of laziness, and others out of pride; both which lurk under the pretext of multiplicity of important avocations. But since your quality, Theophilus, and station in the world, may either make you need to be armed against this temptation, or give you opportunities to assist those that are endangered by it, give me leave on this occasion to tell you, that those grandees that pretend want of leisure for their neglect of the reading of the Scripture, must be able to give a rare account of all the portions of their time, to make those pass for a misemployment of it that are laid out to-

[1] Numb. xvii. 4, 8.

wards the purchase of a happy eternity, which it is not over modest for those to expect from God, that grudge him the rent of that time of which they are but his tenants at will. But to manifest how unlikely this pretence is to pass current, I shall represent, that in the self-same chapter where God fashions a king fit to govern his own people; he enjoins concerning the book of the law, that 'it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life;'[1] which the next verse intimates shall be thereby prolonged;[2] and, indeed, it often happens, that as Samuel's barren mother, for lending one of her children freely unto the Lord, was blessed with many others;[3] so the days consecrated to God's service rather improve than impoverish our stock of time. Nay, the king was (in that place of Deuteronomy[4]) not only obliged to read the law, but to write it too: upon which subject, if I misremember not, the learnedest of the rabbies tells us, that the king (as indeed God usually charges eminence of place with eminence of piety) was bound to write it out himself, and that as king; for, though before his ascending the throne, as any other Israelite, he had a transcript of his own writing, yet was there annexed to the acquist of the regal sceptre, a duty of copying with the same hand that swayed it.[5] To Joshua, both a general and a judge, who was to wield the swords both of Astrea and of Bellona; to govern one numerous people and conquer seven; the words of God are very remarkable: 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate

[1] Deut. xvii. 18, 19. [2] Verse 20. [3] 1 Sam. ii. 20, 21.
[4] Verse 18. [5] Rambam, or, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon.

therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.'[1] David was a shepherd, a conqueror, and a king, and had certainly no unfrequent distractions, both before he came to the crown, (whilst he lived a despised younger brother, an envied courtier, a diffident fugitive, and a distrusted captain,) and after, whilst he wore, lost, and regained it; but how little the time employed in the study of the Scripture prejudiced his secular affairs his story and successes may attest; and how large a portion of his time that study shared, you may be plentifully informed by himself, and save me the transcribing much of the Book of Psalms. He gathered bays both on Parnassus and in the field of honour; and equally victorious in duels and in battles, his exploits and his conquests were such, as (transcending those in romances almost as much in their strangeness as their truth) needed an infallible historian to exact a belief which their greatness and their number would dissuade; he added to his regal crown of gold, two others (of bays and laurel) which his successful sword and numerous pen, making him both a conqueror and a poet, gained him from victory and the muses; and yet for all this greatness and this fame, and that multitude of distractions that still attends them, the (then extant) Scripture was so unseveredly his study, and he so duly matched in his practice what the apostle couples in his precept, 'diligence in business,' and 'fervency in Spirit,'[2] that it is not easy fitlier to re-

[1] Josh, i. 8. [2] Rom. xii.

semble him, than to the winged cherubims in the old tabernacle, whom all the gold and jewels that glittered about them, and all the clouds of incense that fumed before them, could never divert from a fixed posture towards the ark of the testimony that contained the law, and the mercy-seat that represented Christ.[1]

And indeed, it is a saying equally ancient and true, that none should know things better and better things than princes. For their virtues and their vices participate the eminence and authority of their condition; and by an influential exemplariness, so generally fashion and sway their subjects, that as we find in sacred story that the Jews served God or Baal as their kings did; so profane history tells us, that Rome was warlike under Romulus, superstitious under Numa, and so successively moulded into the dispositions of her several princes. Subjects, all the world over, being apt to think imitation a part of the duty of obedience; and being generally but too sensible of the requisiteness of their being like their prince to the being liked by him; a state, like Nebuchadnezzar's mysterious image, should have the head of gold, and the inferior members of a value proportionate to their vicinity to that noblest part.[2] When once I shall see such monarchies and commonwealths no rarities, and see the addictedness of princes to the study of the Scripture, furthering the ulterior accomplishment of that part of it which once promised God's people, 'that kings should be its nursing fathers, and their queens its nurs-

[1] Deut. xxv. 18—21. [2] Dan. ii. 31, 32, &c.

ing mothers;'[1] I shall expect to see the golden age elsewhere than in poets' dreams. For I take not absoluteness to be like a plague, whose almost boundless power is confined to do mischief; but I esteem sovereignty little less applicable and effectual to good than ill. Trajan and Constantine were as great and public blessings, as Nero or Caligula were mischiefs; and virtue on a throne hath not a much less imperious influence than crowned vice. And accordingly I shall permit my good wishes for mankind to turn to expectations, when I shall generally see sovereigns nobly contend for as great a superiority over each other by their virtues, as they possess over their subjects by their fortune; when I shall see potentates make use of Mars' sword but to restrain others from abusing it; and kings affect their resemblance to God less in his unlimitedness of power than his employment of it. But, to step back into my way, and leaving princes to fitter monitors, say something to men of either great titles or employments. There is none of these pragmatical persons that will suffer himself to be so enslaved to his business, but he will allow himself set times, and can daily find leisure for eating, drinking, and other corporeal refections, and frequently for recreations; and certainly, if we valued not our own bodies above our souls, we would, in spite of the urgency of secular affairs and employments, reserve and set apart some time to feed our souls with their true food, God's word; else we shall never be able to say of God with holy Job, 'I have esteemed the words

[1] Isaiah, xlix. 23.

of his mouth more than my necessary food.'[1] I will not urge that Daniel, whose vast abilities had a resembling theatre, and who surpassed other statesmen as much in the number and weight of the affairs he had to manage, as in the excellent spirit and dexterity wherewith he managed them, amidst transactions that busied six score princes, who loaded him with a weight of business capable to have crushed Atlas, could yet find leisure to study the prophet Jeremiah:[2] because it will be perhaps more proper to mention, that even Machiavel himself, that secretary and reputed oracle of state, could find time not only to read but to write plays, (some of which I have seen in Italian,) such as I would not think excellent, though a person from whom so much might be expected had not written them. Let us not then think our business or our recreations a sufficient dispensation from an employment, for which, were they inconsistent, they ought both to be declined; since it is both more concerning than the first, and more satisfying than the latter. But that which is often the true, though seldom the avowed cause of these men's neglect of the Scripture, is not their unleisuredness, but their pride; which makes them think it too mean and trivial an employment for one that is great and wise enough to counsel and converse with princes, and have a vote or hand in those great enterprises and transactions that make such a noise in the world, and are the loud themes of the people's talk and wonder, to amuse themselves to examine the significations of words and phrases. For my part I am no enemy to the call-

[1] Job, xxiii. 12. [2] Dan. vi. 3; ix. 2.

ing of statesmen; I think their profession as requisite as others in a commonwealth; and should think it very injurious to deny them any part of a purchase they pay their care and time for: nor perhaps have I so little studied the improvements of quiet, as to think myself less obliged than others are, to those whose watchings or protection affords it or secures it me. But after all this is said, I love to look upon the world with his eyes that is justly said to 'humble himself (when he vouchsafes) to behold the things that are done in heaven and in earth;'[1] and to take measure of the dimensions of things by the scale his word holds forth. Now in the esteem of him that hath made all things for himself, and of whom his Spirit by his prophet truly says, that the 'nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance;' nay, that 'all nations before him (are) as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity;'[2] the importantest employments are the study and the glory of God. He created this vast fabric of the world to manifest his wisdom, power, and goodness; and in it created man, that it may have an intelligent spectator, and a resident whose rational admiration of so divine a structure may accrue to the glory of the omniscient and almighty Architect. And as he created the world to manifest some of his attributes, so doth he uphold and govern it to disclose others of them. The revolution of monarchies, the fates of princes, and destinies of nations, are but illustrious instances and proclamations of his providence. The whole earth once perished by water to

[1] Psalm cxiii. 6. [2] Isaiah, xl. 13, 17.

signalise his justice on his enemies; and the whole world shall one day perish by fire to exercise that former attribute and evidence his goodness to his children; for whom his faithfulness to his promises will oblige him to build a gloriouser mansion for such glorified residents. The angels, some of whom the visions of Daniel represent as at the helm of kingdoms and of empires,[1] and whose power is so great, that one of them could in one night destroy a force capable, if divided, to have made half a dozen formidable armies:[2] these glorious spirits, I say, whose nature so transcends ours, that the very devil can, without the assistance of virtue, despise the objects of our ambition by a superiority of nature only; for all their high prerogatives and employments think the mysteries unfolded in Scripture worthy their bowing as well as desire to look into,[3] think not themselves too eminent to be messengers and heralds, of what fond mortals think themselves too eminent to read: and, 'being all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation,'[4] disdain not to think our instruction worth their concern, whilst we disdain a concern for our own instruction; nay, the very Messias, whose style is 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'[5] though he be not recorded to have ever read but once,[6] did yet read the Scripture; and think it worthy his expositions and recommending; and well may any think that book worth the reading that God himself thought worth the enditing. When Moses and Elias left their (local not real)

[1] Dan. x. 13. [2] 2 Kings, xix. 35. [3] παρακύψαι, 1 Pet. i. 12. [4] Heb. i. 14. [5] Rev. xvii. 14. [6] Luke, iv. 17, &c.

heaven, and appeared in glory to converse with our transfigured Saviour on the Mount, their discourse was not of the government of kingdoms, or the raising of armies for the subversion of empires, or of those other solemn trifles, which heaven places as much beneath men's thoughts as residence; but of (the inspired book's chief theme) 'his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.'[1] And after that St. Paul had been caught up to the third heaven,[2] and had been blest and refined with his ineffable entertainment there, I wonder not to find him profess so resolutely, that he 'counteth all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ his Lord;'[3] in whom 'faith cometh by hearing, and that hearing of the Word of God;'[4] and who addresses men to the Scriptures, as those which testify of him. And perhaps our Saviour used so frequently to conclude his divine discourses, with that just epiphonema, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,'[5] but to teach us that there is no employment of our faculties that more deserve their utmost attention, than the scrutiny of divine truths. That which is pretended to by this discourse, is to impress this truth, that where God is allowed to be an intelligent and equal valuer of things, a man cannot have so great an employment as to give him cause to think the study of the Scripture a mean one: since, thus saith the Lord, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and

[1] Luke, ix. 31. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 2. [3] Phil. iii. 8.
[4] Rom x. 17. [5] John, v. 39.

knoweth me.'[1] For sure, if the knowledge of God be so glorious a thing, the study of that book whence that knowledge is extracted, and where it it is most refulgent, is not a despicable employment: which sure (to add that upon the by) it is somewhat injuriously thought by those who are so industrious and proud in profane histories and other political books, to discover, or even guess at, those intrigues which commonly but tell us by what crafty arts a knave cozened a fool. Nor (to mention this by the by) even in relation to his own profession, is the Scripture unable to recompense the study of a Christian statesman; for to omit the (perhaps too) extolling mention Machiavel himself makes of Moses amongst the famousest legislators, the historical part of the Bible being endited by an omniscient and unerring Spirit, lays clearly open the true and genuine causes of the establishment, flourishing, and vicissitudes of the princes and commonwealths it relates the story of; whereas other histories (for reasons insisted on in other papers) are liable to great suspicions in the judgment of those that duly ponder the several narratives made often of the same transaction or event by several eye-witnesses: and that the true secret of counsels is so closely locked up, or so artificially disguised, that to have interest enough to discern (what statesmen mind and build on) the truth and mystery of affairs, one must be biased and engaged enough to be shrewdly tempted to be a partial relater of them. But Theophilus, I perceive I have slipped into too long a digression, which yet I hope you will pardon as the effect of an indiscreet, perhaps, but however a great concern for a person, to whom nature, education, and fortune have been so indulgent, that I cannot

[1] Jer. xix. 23, 24.

but look upon his condition as liable to the temptations which either parts or employments singly, and much more both together, are wont to expose men to. But to return.

You may remember, Theophilus, that among the answers which I told you might be made to those that objected against the Scripture, "That it is so unadorned, and so ill-furnished with eloquent expressions, that it is wont to prove inefficacious, especially upon intelligent readers." The fifth and last was this, "That it is very far from being agreeable to experience, that the style of the Scripture does make it unoperative upon the generality of its readers, if they be not faultily indisposed to receive impressions from it."

To make good this reply, I must take notice to you, that that part of the objection which intimates that intelligent readers are not wont to be wrought upon by the Scripture, has been in great part answered already; for I have lately observed to you, that as it may be granted that some witty men who have read the Scripture, have, instead of admiring it, quarrelled with it; so it cannot be denied that many persons as eminent for wit as they, have upon reading it entertained a high veneration for it. So that I see not why the celebrations of those wits that admire it, may not counterbalance the disrespects of those that cavil at it. Especially if we consider, that as to most of those that are looked upon as the witty disregarders of the Scripture, scarce any thing so much as the vanity and boldness of owning that they disregard it, makes them (but undeservedly) be looked upon as wits.

But to this, I shall now add, that whereas the objection speaks of intelligent readers, the greatest

part of such have not that quickness which is wont to make men pass for wits, though they may have other abilities more solid and desirable. And yet that the Bible has a great influence upon this latter sort of intelligent readers, I presume you will easily believe, if you consider how many great scholars, not only professed divines, but others, have, by their learned comments and other writings, endeavoured either to illustrate or recommend the Scripture; and how much a greater number of understanding and sober men, that never published books, have evinced the Scripture's power over them, partly by their sermons and other discourses, public and private, and partly by endeavouring to conform their lives to the dictates of it: which last clause I add, because you can scarce make a better estimate of what power the Scripture has upon men, than by looking at what it is able to make them part with. For not to anticipate what we shall ere long have occasion to mention, let us but consider what numbers of intelligent persons almost every age, without excepting our own, (as degenerate as it is,) has produced who have been taught and prevailed with by the Scripture, and considerations drawn thence, to renounce all the greatest sinful pleasures, and embrace a course of life that oftentimes exposes them to the greatest dangers, and very frequently to no small hardships.

And, indeed, there is scarce any sort of men on which the Scripture has not had a notable influence, as to the reforming and improving many particular persons belonging to it; and to the giving them an affectionate veneration for the book whereunto they owed their instruction. The accounts ecclesiastical history gives us of the rate at which devout

persons, both in former and latter ages, would purchase the Bible, when it was dangerous, and perhaps capital, to be found possessed of it, would, if I should here repeat them, much confirm what I say, and might equally create our wonder and our blushes. Those sorts of professed Christians that seem the most evidently to be liable to temptations to neglect or disregard the Scripture, are either those that do, or would pass for wits, or those that live in courts. The former oftentimes thinking themselves too wise to be taught, especially by a book they think not eloquent; and among the latter there being but too many whose pleasures are so bewitching, or so dear to them, that they like nothing that would divert, much less divorce them from their pursuit, or else whose business is so much and perhaps so important, that they have not leisure enough to learn, or have too much pride to think they need do it; but yet even among those that have worn crowns either of gold or bays, or (what perhaps some value above both) of myrtle, the Bible has not wanted votaries; for not to repeat the names of those whom I have formerly mentioned to have been as well lovers of the Scripture as favourites of the muses, among the other sort of men, 'those that' (to speak in our Saviour's terms) 'are gorgeously apparelled, lived delicately, and are in kings' courts,'[1] there have been divers persons, upon whom the power of the Scripture has been almost as conspicuous as their station among men. I will not mention that devout treasurer of the Æthiopian queen, who even upon the highway (whose length neither deterred nor tired

[1] Luke, vii. 25.

his devotion) could not forbear to read the prophet Isaiah, and inquire even of a mere stranger that passed by alone, and on foot, the meaning of a passage of whose sense he doubted. Nor will I urge any other instances of great men's studiousness of the Scripture, afforded us by sacred story. And therefore I shall not press the example of that great and wise Daniel, whose matchless parts not only cast upon him the highest employment of the world's monarchy, and disengaged him from the ruins of it; but (what has scarce a precedent amongst the very wisest statesmen) continued him in as much greatness as ever he possessed under the predecessor, under the successor; and such a successor too as made his predecessor's carcass the ascent to his throne; I will not, I say, at present, urge the examples extant in the sacred records of great men's studiousness of them, because even secular and more recent histories may inform us, that even in courts all men's eyes have not been so dazzled by the glittering vanities that are wont to abound there, but that some of them have discerned, and practically acknowledged the prerogatives of the Scripture. Though I cannot say that many kings have been of this number, because there have been but few kings in all, in respect of the numbers that compose the inferior conditions of men: yet, even among these, and in degenerate ages, some have been signally studious of the Bible; such was that Sixth Edward, who imitated the early active piety of Joash, without imitating his defection from it, and whose short heavenly life manifests how soon, even amidst the temptations of courts, grace can ripen men for glory; and

such was that learned king,[1] whose having more than perfunctorily studied the Scripture, his solid defence of divers of its truths against its misinterpreters, have sufficiently proclaimed to the world. Nay, even in those darker times that preceded the Reformation, that excellent Aragonian king, Alphonsus, the honour both of his title and his times, in spite of his contemplations and his wars, could, (as himself used to glory) spare time from studies and his distractions, to read the Bible forty times with comments and glosses on it: being not, for all his astronomy, so taken up with the contemplation of heaven, as to deny himself leisure to study in his book that made it the ways of getting thither. Nor shall I forbear to mention here the last pope, (Urban the Eighth,) who, when being cardinal, he wanted not the hopes of becoming both temporal and ecclesiastical lord of that proud city, which (as if she were designed to be still, one way or other, the world's mistress,) doth still rule little less of the world upon the score of religion, than she did before upon that of arms; in the midst of affairs perhaps more distracting than busied most potentates, and honours almost as great as are paid to monarchs, could find room in a head crowded with affairs enough to have distressed Machiavel, for reflections upon the Scripture; some of whose portions I have delighted to read in the handsome paraphrases of his pious muse. Which I scruple not to acknowledge, because that though I did, which I do not, look upon every one that dissents from me, as an enemy; yet I should

[1] King James.

be apt to think that they can scarce love virtue enough, that love it not in their very enemies; congruously to which we find that Hannibal had statues erected in Rome itself: and, though I were so uncharitable and so unexperienced as to think a man that holds an error can scarce have any good qualities, yet, upon such a kind of score as that which made David so angry with him that took away the poor man's single lamb, the fewer commendable qualities I see in my adversaries, the more scruple I would make to rob them of any way of them. Nor hath that very sex that so often makes divertisements its employments, been altogether barren in titled votaries to the Scripture. Not to mention that Grecian princess,[1] whose proselyted muse made Homer turn evangelist, how conversant that excellent mother and resembling daughter, Paula and Eustochium, were in the sacred rolls, is scarce unknown to any that are not strangers to the writings of St. Jerome; for some of whose learned comments on the Scripture we are indebted to the charitable importunity of their requests. And even in our times, that so much degenerate from the primitive ones, how eminent a student and happy a proficient in the study of the Bible, that glory of princesses, and the envy of the princes of her time, Queen Elizabeth was, her life and reign sufficiently declare. Her sister's predecessor, that matchless lady Jane, who had all the qualities the best patriots could desire in a queen, but an unquestionable title, and in whose sad fate, besides her sex and the graces that enamour ours of it, her country, philosophy, virtue,

[1] Eudoxia, wife to the emperor Theodosius.

and religion, did all sustain a loss, was a conspicuous studier of the inspired books; wherein her prospered sedulousness gave her an understanding much above her age and sex, though not above her virtue. And besides Eudoxia, there have been divers other persons of the highest quality of that sex, and even some of those on whom nature or fortune, or rather beauty or providence, had conferred a sovereignty, whom the splendour, the pleasures, and the avocations of courts could not keep from searching in God's word preservatives against the contagion of their condition, and partly history, and partly even conversation have sometimes with delight made me observe, how some of those celebrated ladies, whose fatal beauties have made so many idolaters, have devoutly turned those fair eyes, that were, and did such wonders, upon those severe writings that depreciate all but the beauty of the soul, from those flattering ascriptions that deified that of the body. And it is not to be marvelled at, that such readers as are not infidels, by reading the Bible once should be prevailed with to read it oftener, not only because of the inviting excellency of what it teaches, but because its author does so earnestly in it enjoin the study of it, that scarce any can think the neglect of it no fault, save those that are guilty of it. Nor is their so assiduous perusal of the Scripture so much to be marvelled at, as commended, in persons of that softer sex, which is perhaps more susceptible than ours of strong impressions of devotion. For sure, if we loved God, I do not say as we ought to love Him, but as we can and do love inferior things, it would hugely endear the Scripture to us, that the object of our devotion is the author of that

book. When a true flame, though but for a fading object, doth once possess a fervent lover's breast; what a fondness doth his passion for his mistress give him for all things related to her. Her residences, her walks, her colours, and the least trifles that have belonged to her, exact a kindness that is not due to trifles, though it be but for presenting to his memory its almost only object, and refreshing him with an ideal in the absence of an immediater presence of her. But if the favoured amourist be blest with any lines dignified by that fair hand (give me leave to talk of lovers in their own language) especially if they be kind as well as hers, how assiduously, and with what raptures do his greedy eyes peruse them, tasting each several expression with its own transport, and finding in each line at each new reading some new delight or excellency: this welcome letter grows sooner old than stale; and although his two frequent kisses have worn it to tatters, (in which he preserves it, if not worships it too, as a relic,) with fresh and still insatiate avidities doth the unwearied lover prize that, too often, either deluding or insignificant writing, above the noblest raptures of princes, and liberallest patents of poets; and (not to urge the superstitious devotion of our worshippers of relics) certainly if we had for God but half as much love as we ought, or even pretend to have, we could not but frequently, if not transportedly, entertain ourselves with his leaves, which (as parhelions to the sun) are at once his writings and his picture, both expressing his vast and unmerited love to us, and exhibiting the most approaching or least unresembling idea of our beloved, that the Deity hath framed for mortals to apprehend.

It was the devout quarrel of a devout father to some of the choicest composures antiquity hath left us, that he could not find Christ named there; and if, as it is not to be doubted, divers of the devout ladies I was lately speaking of, were of his mind, sure at that rate they were not ordinarily kind to the Scripture; where the prophets and the apostles, those darker and more clear evangelists, do so unanimously and assiduously celebrate the Messiah, that when I read and confer them, I sometimes fancy myself present at our Saviour's triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, where both 'those that went before him, and those that followed after him, sung Hosannah to the Son of David.'[1]

Wherefore, since even great wits, great princes, and great beauties, have not still, by all those temptations to which these attributes exposed them, been kept from being also great votaries to the Scripture, it cannot charitably be doubted, but that in most ages some pious persons have been able to say truly to God, in Jeremiah's terms, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was to me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart:'[2] and if the persons I mention have been but few, I can attribute that fewness but to the paucity of wise and good men; and as for persons of other ranks in ecclesiastical stories, the instances are not so rare of the addictedness of God's children to his word, but that we might thence produce them almost in throngs, if we had not nobler inducements to the reading of the inspired volume than example: and if it were not less to be venerated,

[1] Mark, xxi. 9; xi. 9. [2] Jerem. xv. 16.

because so many saints have studied it, as because the study of it made many of those men saints, (I mean not nominal but real ones,) which we need not much wonder at, whilst such a saint as Saint Paul was, assures us, that it is all of it divinely inspired and improveable to all the uses requisite to the entire accomplishment of God's servants.[1] But, Theophilus, to return to what I was formerly discoursing of, the transforming power the Scripture has upon many of its readers, I must subjoin, that though through the goodness of God, these be far more numerous than the professed adversaries and contemners of the Scripture, yet these make not so great a part of those that acknowledge the Bible, as it were well they did; because both experience and our Saviour's parable have sufficiently taught us, that good seed does not always fall into good ground, and that many intervening accidents may, after it has been sown, make it miscarry and prove fruitless; but when you find (as I fear you may but too often) that the Scripture has not upon its readers, and especially upon those that are profane, that power which I seemed to ascribe to it, and which it ought to have, you may be pleased to remember, that I plainly suppose in my fifth answer, that those to whom the Scripture is addressed must not be culpably indisposed to be wrought upon by it; which that profane persons are, I presume you will easily grant; for when our Saviour said, that 'If any man will do the will of him that sent him, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or no:'[2] he clearly intimates that there is required a disposition as well in the

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 16. [2] John, vii. 17.

eye of his soul (if I may so speak) as in the object proposed, to make a man discern the excellency and origination of what is taught, how valuable soever. Saint Paul, speaking of himself and other penmen and teachers of the Scriptures, affirms, that they 'speak wisdom among them that are perfect;' and though not this world's wisdom, yet, 'the wisdom of God in a mystery, even that hidden one which God ordained before the world, unto our glory.'[1] But for these scorners, it is no wonder they so fruitlessly read the Scripture, without descrying any of this mysterious wisdom, it being a sentence of the Scripture itself, 'that a scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not,'[2] (the expression is odd in the original, but I must not stay to descant upon it,) as the Sodomites could not find the angels, when once they sought them to prostitute and defile them.[3]

But besides profane wits, there are too many other readers who are, more or less, guilty of opposing the reforming and improving influence of the Scripture, upon their own hearts; either upon the score of their not sufficiently believing the truths contained in the Scripture, or upon that of their not duly pondering them. That unbelief is the fruitful mother of more sins than are wont to be imputed to it, and that many baptized persons are not free from greater degrees of it than they are suspected of by others, or even by themselves, I could here easily manifest, if I had not professedly discoursed of that subject in another place. And indeed, there needs but a comparing of most men's lives with the promises and threats held forth in

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 7. [2] Prov. xiv. 6. [3] Gen. xix. 5, 11.

the Scripture of no less than everlasting joys and endless torments, to make us believe that there are multitudes of professed Christians, to whom may be applied what the writer to the Hebrews says of the perverse Jews of Old, 'That what they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it,'[1] or (as the Greek will bear) because they were not united by faith to the things they heard. But this is not all; for oftentimes the doctrines of the Scripture lose much of their efficacy, even where they are cordially believed, because they are not sufficiently laid to heart. The disparity of the influences of the bare belief and the due perpension of a truth, is, methinks, conspicuous enough in men's thoughts of death. For though that they shall die is so truly believed that it cannot seriously be doubted, yet how doth men's inadvertency make them live here as if they were to do so always! whereas, when once grace, sickness, the sight of a dying friend, or some other tragic spectacle, hath seriously minded them of death, it is amazing to observe how strange an alteration is produced in their lives by the active and permanent impression of that one obvious and unquestioned truth, that those lives must have a period; and to see how much the sober thoughts of death contribute to fit men for it: it being so imperious an inducement to deny ungodly and worldly lusts, and to live σωφρόνως και δικαίως δὲ ἐυσεβῶς ἐν τῳ νῦν αἰῶνι, 'soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world,'[2] that we must one day leave it; that I admire not much that father's celebrated strictness

[1] Heb. iv. 2. [2] Tit. ii. 12.

and austerity, who tells us, that he fancied always sounding in his inward ears, that dreadful alarum of, *Surgite mortui et venite ad judicium*, 'Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.'

Yet, notwithstanding the indisposition of many readers to reverence and obey the Scripture, and notwithstanding that in divers passages of it, the ornaments of language are, for reasons above specified, purposely declined; yet we find not but that the Scripture for all these disadvantages, is by the generality of its readers both esteemed and obeyed at another guess rate than any other book of ethics or devotion. And multitudes, even of those whose passions or interests will not suffer them to be in some points guided by it, are notwithstanding swayed by it, to forbear or practise divers things in cases wherein other books would not prevail with them. As Herod, though the Baptist could not persuade him to quit his Herodias, did yet, upon John's preaching, do many other things, and 'heard him gladly.'[1] . . . . . I was going to say, that we may not unfitly apply to the word of God what divines have observed of God the word; for as those accidents that loudliest proclaimed our Saviour's having assumed our human nature and infirmities, were attended with some circumstances that conspicuously attested his divinity; so in those passages in which the majesty of the author's style is most veiled and disguised, there is yet some peculiarity that discloses it. But I shall less scruple to tell you, that in divers of those passages in which the Holy Ghost (who in the Greek father's wonted expression, does often *συγκατα-*

[1] Mark, xii. 37.

Συγκαταβαίνειν ἡμῖν, stoop to our capacity, and, as it were, sink himself down to our level) seems most to have vouchsafed a condescension to the style of men; and to have commanded his secretaries, as he once did the prophet Isaiah, to write, בחרט אנש *be-chæret enosh*, 'with a man's pen;'[1] in divers of those very places, I say, there is something so awful, and so peculiarly his, that the sun, even when he descends into the west, remains still lucider than any of the stars; so the Divine Inspirer of the Scriptures, even when his style seems most to stoop to our capacities, doth yet retain a prerogative above merely human writings. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,'[2] says an apostle; and God, whose attribute is to be *καρδιογνώστης*, 'the knower of hearts,' and whose prerogative it is to 'form the spirit of man within him, understandeth our thoughts afar off.'[3] Certainly, then, if we consider God as the creator of our souls, and so likeliest to know the frame and springs, and nature of his own workmanship, we shall make but little difficulty to believe, that in the book written for and addressed to men, he hath employed very powerful and appropriated means to work upon them. And in effect, there is a strange movingness, and, if the epithet be not too bold, a kind of heavenly magic is to be found in some passages of the Scripture which is to be found no where else; and will not easily be better expressed than in the proper terms of the Scripture; 'For the word of God,' says it, 'is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-eged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of

[1] Isaiah, viii. 1. [2] Acts, xv. 18.
[3] Acts, i. 24; Zech. i. 1; Psalm xiii. 2.

the thoughts and intents of the heart:'[1] wherefore, that Junius (as himself relates) was converted from a kind of atheist to a believer, upon the reading of the first chapter of John; that a rabbi, by his own confession, was converted from a Jew to a Christian, by the reading of the fifty-third of Isaiah; that St. Austin was changed from a debauchee into a saint, by that passage of the thirteenth to the Romans and the thirteenth verse; and that another father, whose fear had made him disclaim his faith, burst out publicly into a shower of tears, upon the occasional reading of the sixteenth verse of the fiftieth Psalm, are effects that I do not so much admire, as I do that such are produced no oftener. And truly, for my own part, the reading of the Scripture hath moved me more, and swayed me more powerfully to all the passions it would infuse, than the wittiest and eloquentest composures that are extant in our own and some other languages. Nay, so winning is the majesty of the Scripture, that many (like those that fall in love in earnest with the ladies they first courted but out of what the French call gallantry) who began to read it out of curiosity, have found themselves engaged to continue that exercise out of conscience; and not a few of those that did at first read the New Testament only to learn some unknown language it is translated into, or for some such trivial purpose, have been, by the means that they elected, carried beyond the end that they designed, and met a destiny not ill resembling that of Zacheus, who, climbing up into a sycamore growing in our Saviour's way, only to look upon him, passed thence to be his proselyte and convert, and to entertain him joyfully, both in his house and

[1] Heb. iv. 12.

heart.[1] And though it be true that the church's testimony be commonly our first, yet it is not always our chief inducement to believe the divinity of holy writ; its own native prerogatives heightening that into faith which the church's authority left but opinion. To which purpose I remember a handsome observation of some of the ancients; that the Samaritans that first believed in Christ upon the woman's report, when afterwards they were blessed with an immediate conversation with himself, they exultingly told the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world:'[2] for so divers that first believed the Scripture but upon the church's score, are afterwards by acquaintedness brought to believe the Scripture upon its own score, that is, by the discovery of those intrinsic excellencies and prerogatives that manifest its heavenly origination. . . . . This sacred book, even where it hath not embellishments of language, doth not want them; being so much recommended by its imperious persuasiveness without them, that it is more ennobled by their needlessness, than it would be by their affluence. And, if to some passages of Scripture we must apply that of St. Paul, (whereby yet he thought to recommend his ministry to the Corinthians,) 'that his speech and his preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως, 'in demonstration of the spirit of power;'[3] we may also remember, that he

[1] Luke, xix. à v. 1, ad. 10; Matt. xiii. 19, 20, &c.
[2] John, iv. 39—42. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 1—4.

subjoins as the reason that moved him to use this plain and unadorned way of teaching his Corinthians, 'that their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.'[1] And truly, the efficacy and operations of the Bible, in comparison of those of all other books, duly considered, we may esteem, that as God oftentimes doth in the Scripture, what in the Scripture he is said to do, 'draw us with the cords of a man,' (passages wreathed with flowers of rhetoric,) so is it not unfit, that he should sometimes employ expressions that, carrying away our obedience, our reverence, and our assent in spite of our indispositions to them, might manifest their derivation from him, who is not tied to such means as men would think necessary, but can compass his ends as well *by* as *without* any: nor can I often consider the instances experience affodrs us of the efficacy of many texts, (which some that pretend to eloquence accuse of having none,) without sometimes calling to mind, how in the book of nature God has veiled in an obscure and homely stone an attractiveness (unvouchsafed to diamonds and rubies) which the stubbornest of metals does obsequiously acknowledge. And, as the loadstone not only draws what the sparklingest jewels cannot move, but draws stronglier, where armed with iron than crowned with silver, so the Scripture, not only is movinger than the glitteringest human styles, but hath oftentimes a potenter influence on men in those passages that seem quite destitute of ornaments, than in those where rhetoric is conspicuous.

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 5.

The Conclusion of one part of the Discourse concerning the Scripture and the transition to the next.

I should now, Theophilus, immediately pass on to the other things I am to discourse to you of, concerning the Scripture, but that the curiosity wherewith you are wont to take notice of my practices, and to make inquiries after my private opinions, makes me imagine you telling me, that I do often read, and do much oftener commend books of devotion, notwithstanding all the prerogatives I have attributed to the Scripture; wherefore to this I shall answer, that I esteem indeed the truths of Scripture so important and valuable, that I cannot be troubled to see them presented to us in variety of dresses, that we may the more frequently and the more attentively take notice of them. And, though some devout composures are so unskilfully written as to be much fitter to express the devotion of the writer than to excite it in the reader, yet there are others so handsomely and so pathetically penned, that a good man can scarce read them without growing better, and even a bad man must be very much so, without becoming less so by perusing them. Nor do I at all design to disparage books of devotion, when I prefer the Scripture to them, that being so noble and matchless a work, that a book may attain to a high degree of excellence, whilst it remains inferior to the Scripture, of whose pre-eminences I have already on several occasions named divers to you; and therefore shall at present only recommend to your observation this one advantage of the Scripture, even as to those things that are also to be met with in other books of devo-

tion—that if 'the words of the wise be (as Solomon tells us they are) like nails fastened by the masters of the assemblies,'[1] the selfsame nail must enter less or deeper according to the strength of the hand that drives it in; and doubtless, any doctrine believed to come from God, in the same terms it is delivered to us, is like to be entertained with a deeper and obsequiouser respect; concurrently whereunto, the apostle, to set forth the Thessalonians' reception of the gospel, says, 'that they received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God.'[2] After which, it is no wonder he could immediately subjoin, that 'it did also effectually work in them that believed.' And, though it be very true that the foreignness and obscurity of some texts will require, as well as the teeming richness of others will bear, their being alleged in words much more numerous than those whose involved or contracted senses they are to display; yet is it also as true, that men do not unfrequently mistake themselves in thinking to deliver the Holy Ghost's conceptions in fitter terms than his own, the proper precise expressions of Scripture being oftentimes so pathetical and sinewy, that he that stretches them, enervates them; and paraphrases, though handsome, do as much wrong them, as a mixture of silver, though no ignoble metal, does wrong an ingot of gold. And though some texts, like pearls, lose indeed of their beauty, but operate, and are administered more successfully, beaten to powder, or with other cordial ingredients made up into a confection, yet divers sacred expressions do, like diamonds, lose both their spark-

[1] Eccles. xii. 11. [2] 1 Thess. ii. 13.

ling lustre, and engraving faculty, when ground to dust, and lose more in their entireness and form than can be recompensed by any addition: and truly, as to my own particular, no book of devotion doth constantly affect me so powerfully as the Bible. And whereas I am of so nice a palate, that in my esteem composures of that kind still lose at the second reading, in the inspired volume familiarity breeds not contempt but reverence; and I like a book which acquaintance still endears. When I first began attentively to read the Scripture, and, accordingly to my custom when I read books whereof I have a promising expectation, to mark in the margin the passages that seemed to deserve a peculiar notice or reflection, I marked but here and there some verses in a chapter, but when upon a greater familiarity with the idiotisms, the sense, and the applicableness of Scripture I came to resurvey it, I then in some places marked the whole chapter, and in most others left much fewer texts than before unfurnished with some mark of reference. And whereas at my entrance I took even the choicest part of the Bible to be at best but like some Indian province, wherein, though mines and gems were more abundant than in other countries, yet they were but sparingly to be met with here and there; after a competent stay my ensuing perusals presented it me, if not as a royal jewel made up of gold and precious stones, yet, which is gloriouser, like Aaron's breast-plate, a sacred jewel, the particular instructions for which were given by God himself, and which, besides the various number of flaming gems set in fine gold, and placed in a mysterious order, was ennobled by that Urim and Thummim,

wherein God vouchsafed to reveal himself to mortals, and was adorned with so much cunning work in gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen, that the contrivance and workmanship lent a lustre to the glittering materials, without being obscured by them. This experiment keeps me from wondering to find in the inspired poet's description of the man he attributes a blessedness to, that his *chapatz*, 'his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law will he meditate day and night.'[1] For the word other translations render *voluntas et studium*, ours Englishes delight, and indeed the Hebrew חפץ will bear both senses, and seems there emphatically to signify a study replenished with so much delight to the devout and intelligent prosecutors of it, that, like the hallelujahs of the blessed, it is at once a duty and a pleasure, an exercise and a recompence of piety. And, indeed, if God's blessing upon the devout Christian's study of that book do, according to the Psalmist's prayer, 'open his eyes to discern the' נפלאות *Niplaot*, 'hidden wonders contained in it,'[2] he should, in imitation of him that in the same Psalm says of his God, 'I rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil,'[3] be as satisfied as navigators that discover unknown countries. And I must confess, that when sometimes with the apostles in the mount, I contemplate Moses and Elias talking with Christ, I mean the law and prophets symphonizing with the gospel, I cannot but (resemblingly transported with a like motive) exclaim with Peter, 'It is good for me to be here,'[4] and cease to think the Psalmist an hyperbolist, for comparing the transcendant sweet-

[1] Psal. i. 2.
[2] Psal. cxix. 8.
[3] Verse 162.
[4] Matt. xvii. 4.

ness of God's word to that inferior one of honey,[1] which is like it in nothing more than in that of both their suavities, experience gives much advantageouser notions than descriptions can.

But, Theophilus, upon condition you will not call this excursion of your own occasioning a fit of devotion, I will no longer detain you on one subject, but forthwith proceed to discourse of those other things that I am to consider in the Scripture besides the style. For though this be such as I have been representing it, yet I hope we shall in our progress find, that it will be far less fit to apply to this matchless book that of the heathen poet,

'Materiam superabus opus———'

than that sacred one of the Psalmist, where he as well says, that 'the king's daughter is all glorious within,' as that 'her clothing is of wrought gold.'[2]

[1] Psal. cxix. 103. [2] Psal. xlv. 13.

THE END.

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